



The History of the Kansas City Art Institute A Century of Excellence and Beyond



Written by Milton S. Katz

A vital song that makes creativity dance

"Art itself may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe ...
to find in its forms, in its light, in its shadows, in the
aspects of matter and in the facts of life what of each is
fundamental, what is enduring, and essential —
their one illuminating and convincing quality —
the very truth of their existence."

Joseph Conrad

Preface to "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'"

The Task of the Artist

Keener Studio
Errata: p. 11, p. 15 (Disney), p. 32 - William T.

Top photo: Chair of the ceramics department, Cary Esser, in student critique, 2004. Lower photo: A 1948 life drawing class. Founded in 1885, the Kansas City Art Institute is one of the

oldest and most respected colleges of art and design, awarding the bachelor of fine arts degree. A comprehensive liberal arts program complements an emphasis in one of the

following majors: animation, art history, ceramics, creative writing, design, fiber, interdisciplinary arts, new media, painting, photography, printmaking and sculpture.



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Top photo: A life drawing class, 1948. Lower photo: Patrick Clancy, chair of photography, new media and printmaking, in critique with student, 2004. In 1948, the Art Institute enrolled around 600 full-time students

from all areas of the country and several foreign nations. Between 1996 and 2004, the college completed \$18 million in campus improvements, and in 2004 it once again enrolled around 600 students.



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Foreward

Any institution that reaches a milestone such as a 120th anniversary does well to reflect on its accomplishments so it can dream for the future. It is a privilege to take my place in the pantheon of volunteer leaders who have served the college so well, from Charles C. Ripley in the 1880s, to J.C. Nichols in the 1920s, to my good friend and immediate predecessor Charles S. Sosland. I salute the Kansas City Art Institute and liberal arts professor Milton Katz, who has done yeoman's work in documenting the college's history through the start of 2005.

Herbert Kohn

Chair

KCAI Board of Trustees



As we look toward the future, taking stock of our history becomes ever more important. I can think of no better person to lead us in this enterprise than Dr. Milton Katz, professor of history in the School of Liberal Arts. While not impartial in his passion for the Kansas City Art Institute, he has developed the ability to write about the college he loves from an objective viewpoint, and I thank him for his very good work.

Looking back while looking forward is an intriguing process, and while this book is about history, it is also about vision. This narrative embraces the vision of many people over many years — the vision of those who founded the college as well as those who subsequently have led, nurtured, sustained, molded and grown it into one of the finest colleges of art and design in the United States. The credit for all of this goes to the generations of trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, donors, students and alumni who have touched this institution since its earliest days.

How we define our excellence may change over time, but one consistent measure will surely be the many individuals who studied here and went on to take their place among the finest artists and designers in the world.

I write these words the day after experiencing an extraordinary gathering on campus of graduates from all over the country, who joined with friends and colleagues to honor the memory of Ken Ferguson, emeritus professor and former chair of our widely respected ceramics department. Some of the finest ceramic artists and educators in the nation came back to honor their teacher and also their experience at KCAI. Ultimately our history is only as good as the degree to which the college has made a positive impact on the lives of our students, who go on to enrich our world with their gifts. If this memorial gathering is one gauge of our success, then our history has enormous meaning. I hope that in savoring this account of where we have been, you will be inspired to join me in imagining all the possibilities that lie ahead.

Kathleen Collins

President



Main Street, Kansas City,
Missouri, 1885. Photo courtesy
of Kansas City, Missouri
Public Library.

The upstairs room of the
Deardorf Building at 11th and
Main streets was the first
"studio quarters" for the city.

By the mid-1880s, Kansas City
was growing rapidly to more
than 100,000 residents, and its
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A Modest Beginning 1885-1920

The genesis of the Kansas City Art Institute, the oldest cultural institution in the city, can be traced back to 1885, when the town was officially still called the City of Kansas. By the mid-1880s, Kansas City was growing rapidly to more than 100,000 residents, its railroad, cattle and grain industries were booming, and a daily newspaper called *The Kansas City Star* had been established and was prospering under its founder and editor William Rockhill Nelson.

Although most of the townspeople were preoccupied with industrial and commercial expansion, a small group of community leaders realized the need for the cultural amenities of life. Following the suggestion of Mr. Fred Richardson, long connected with the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, they formed a Sketch Club in 1885 with the expressed purpose "to talk over art matters in general and to judge pictures." Meetings were first held in the homes of the various members, then in the Deardorf Building on the southeast corner of 11th and Main streets, where the upstairs rooms served as "studio quarters" for the city.

"The Sketch Club was the first organized art effort in the city," recalled one of the original founders, Mrs. Homer Reed, the former Laura Coates, years later. "Members of the club made sketches for each meeting, at which the life and works of some famous artist were discussed. Art

certainly was in its infancy then," Mrs. Reed continued, "but in that early start in years of struggles that the present generation scarcely can conceive, the foundation was laid for the great progress that has been made."

The first available role of membership as of May 1886 included some twenty local artists and leaders of the Kansas City community. Hitching posts still lined Main Street when, in the spring of 1887, an exhibition of the works of the artist members was given in the Deardorf Building, the first of its kind in Kansas City. Twelve members of the club exhibited twenty-eight sketches, many of them Kansas City scenes such as "On the Westport Road" and "Edgerton Place, Wyandotte." The sketches were for sale as well as public view, and quoted prices ranged from \$1 to \$25. The proceeds were earmarked for starting an art school and museum. *The Kansas City Star* commented that this "modest display has surprised large numbers of visitors who had not suspected that aesthetic development had yet gained a foothold in Kansas City." As one historian noted, "While it contained no works of great merit, it was largely attended and served to crystallize public sentiment."

One prominent Sketch Club member, Charles C. Ripley, suggested that the time was ripe for a Kansas City art school and its necessary accompaniment of an art collection. After much per-

suasion by Ripley, Edward H. Allen and Edwin R. Weeks, twelve men of means and influence each agreed to pay \$100 for each of three succeeding years as a maintenance fund for the school, and a purchasing sum of \$2,065 had been raised for equipment. The twelve original benefactors, besides the three mentioned above, included Charles L. Dobson, Homer Reed, George F. Winter, M.B. Wright, William M. Smith, Jefferson Brumback, Charles F. Morse, Charles O. Tichenor and W.A.M. Vaughn.

Kansas City Art Association and School of Design

The art movement here gained such momentum that the Kansas City Art Association and School of Design was incorporated on July 18, 1887, with its stated purpose being "to conduct a school of instruction in drawing, painting, modeling and designing and the construction and maintenance of buildings suitable for such purposes." Election of officers was held, and Edward H. Allen was chosen president; Mrs. M. B. Wright, vice president; Charles C. Ripley, secretary; and Homer Reed, treasurer. Under the direction of Mr. Ripley, a complete set of models and casts, 164 in all, were purchased from the governmental agencies of Great Britain, together with 135 fine autotypes and photographs of noted statuary and paintings. The cost of the equipment was \$10,000. These were installed in five rooms on the fourth floor of the Bayard Building, 1214 Main Street, and from the day

the rooms were open for inspection, the surprise and satisfaction of the public constituted an asset which carried the fledging association through many troubled times. Noted one historian, "People seemed to feel that the Art Association had proved itself and was worthy of support."

The newly named School of Fine Arts and a free night school for instruction in mechanical and architectural drawing, modeling and the element of design was opened on January 2, 1888. The director of the school was Lawrence S. Brumidi of the National Academy of Rome, and the faculty consisted of Miss Lillian Crawford of the Cincinnati School of Design, F. L. Fitzgibbon of the National Academy of New York and Miss M.R. Griffin of Spread's Academy of Chicago. Thereafter, the directors were successively: Elmer Boyd Smith, who had studied in Paris; J. Franklin Steacy, who had also spent years in Paris and had been supervisor of the Art School of Western Massachusetts; and Alfred Houghton Clark of the Boston School. Charles C. Ripley was now serving as president of the Art Association; Mrs. David R. Porter, as vice president; Homer Reed, as treasurer; and R. W. Bartleman, as secretary.

In the spring of 1892, the school had grown in both attendance and scope to such an extent that a curator was necessary, and Mrs. Helen Parson was appointed in this capacity. Members

of the Art Association numbered 244. The school year closed with 114 students in attendance. The academic work in drawing and color had been varied by costume sketching, composition, pen and ink, still life in oil, pastel and watercolor and outdoor sketching from nature. Interest in the classes was so great that a summer session of six weeks was opened, and four new faculty members were added: George Van Millet and William Weber, who had just returned from studies in Europe; Mrs. Louis Koehler, who had an international reputation as a worker in the applied arts; and Mrs. Edith Whitehead Sheridan, who had a successful business in interior decoration in Chicago.

The school was becoming widely known as offering facilities for good preparatory work. Patronage came from every neighboring state, the list of members of the association numbered 244, including William Rockhill Nelson, and exhibitions both of schoolwork and of collections brought from other cities were well attended. When the Western Art League membership and activities were absorbed by the Art Association, the school moved to the upper story of the Jaccard Building at 1012-1014 Walnut Street. *The Kansas City Star* boasted that the school now had "a faculty unsurpassed by any city in the West and unequaled by any city of its size in the United States."

Unfortunately, just as the school was assuming an air of order and permanence, a fire on the night of January 12, 1893, destroyed the entire equipment of the association. It was temporarily relocated in the Y.M.C.A. A period of financial depression followed, however, and for the next fourteen years the school operated in only a limited way, moving from the Y to the Baird Building at 6th and Wyandotte streets, in the hope that with better times, money might be forthcoming. In 1894, the school was abandoned for the time being, and the treasurer, J.S. Downing, was instructed by the board of governors to put the money on hand at interest.

The Fine Arts Institute of Kansas City

In 1906, a new movement began to revitalize the art school idea and to include a museum in the concept. The Fine Arts Institute of Kansas City was incorporated on February 1, 1907, as the successor to the previous association, and the school was installed in the Owen Building, 1026 Walnut, though it remained there for only a few months. The incorporators were Joseph C. Ford, president; George B. Penney, secretary; and Louis H. Owen, treasurer. For a time the classes were held in the Bayard Building, but in November 1907, the second floor of a building at 113 Wyandotte was taken over. In 1909, Dr. Charles W. Moore succeeded Ford as president. He resigned early in the year, and Charles C. Ripley completed the term as president. William

Top photo: Gallery of Fine Arts Institute of Kansas City, located in the YMCA Building at 1020 McGee Street, 1910. Courtesy of Kansas City, Missouri Public Library.

Lower photo: Noon hour pastime in "life" classroom on a cold November day, 1914. From left to right: Mildred Davenport, Florence (Park) Vasconellos, Letha (Churchill) Walker, and Margaret (Metzinger) Groener.



Saturday classes for talented school children were started in 1915. Among those attending was fourteen-year-old Walt Disney, who had talked his father into paying for weekly art lessons — his only formal

training — which continued until 1917. John Stuart Curry received his first formal art training while attending summer classes at the Institute the following year.

Top photo: A life class, 1917, and an antique class, 1917, in the lower photo. In the first move to broaden the scope of the Institute, the school's director expanded it to be more than just

a school and a place of exhibitions but into an expression of the different activities of the community.



Third- and fourth-year painting class. The 1917-18 catalogue boldly declared: "An Art School is not a luxury. Today the world demands beauty of design as

much in its workshops as in its art galleries. The Art School, by teaching how to produce this effect, has become a necessary factor in modern life."



Rockhill Nelson asked Howard E. Huselton, secretary and director of the school, to reorganize the Fine Arts Institute. Huselton served three years and then resigned after having placed the Institute in its new quarters in the Y.M.C.A. Building at 1021 McGee Street.

Exhibits were placed in storerooms and office buildings downtown and were held cooperatively with the Arts and Crafts Society and other organizations so that expenses might be shared. Within two years, the school was self-supporting. During the first year the enrollment was 381 students, and in the second year, 339. The faculty now numbered ten.

At that time, the Institute served Kansas City and its trade territory as both school and gallery.

Kansas City's "little touch of Latin Quarters," as the press called it at that time, was very much alive again and was in a relatively prosperous condition. Miss Winifred Sexton, secretary and mainstay of the Institute during these years, was quoted in *The Star* as saying, "I don't believe Kansas Citians themselves know just what we are doing here in the way of fine arts. We have a flourishing school, and the promise is for a very successful year." Thomas Tyron of New York, who became the school's director in 1912, made an even loftier prediction when he stated to the press that Kansas City would become the art center of the United States. Although most Kansas Citians associated with the Institute were less grandiose in their dreams, many of them saw their school propelling Kansas City to becoming the art center of the western United States.

In the first move to broaden the scope of the Institute, Tyron expanded it to be more than just a school and a place of exhibitions but into an expression of the different activities of the community. A series of lectures in the different arts and crafts was held each month related to the various exhibits. "We want the people of the community to look at the Institute as a place where all their activities find expression," stated Tyron. "For that reason, we will not confine our lectures to the so-called arts of painting and sculpture. We will include such things as silver, prints, etchings, book binding, church vestments

and embroidery, rugs, textile fabrics, miniatures, bookplates, architecture, furniture and many other matters that are artistic because they are products of skilled workmanship." Saturday classes for talented school children were started in 1915. Among those attending was fourteen-year-old Walt Disney, who had talked his father into paying for weekly art lessons — his only formal training — which continued until 1917. Famous regionalist painter John Steuart Curry received his first formal art training while attending summer classes at the Institute the following year.

By 1916 the Institute numbered almost 300 members paying a minimum of \$10 apiece. It brought to Kansas City a valuable and important collection of French Impressionist paintings by Monet, Pissaro, Renoir, Sisley, Manet, Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec and Mary Cassat from a gallery in Paris that was exhibited for the first time in the Western United States. Sculpture was added to the course offerings under New York artist Robert M. Gage to complement instruction in drawing, painting, design and interior decoration, illustration and commercial art. Financially, the school was also expanding with a benefit at President Edwin W. Shields' home netting \$3,500; and when former president of the school Joseph Ford passed away in 1918, a \$20,000 maintenance fund was left to the school to increase teachers' pay. Full-time tuition was

set at \$90 for three eleven-week semesters, and scholarships were given in each department to the student who had done the best work in the previous year.

The 1917-18 catalogue boldly declared: "An Art School is not a luxury. Today the world demands beauty of design as much in its workshops as in its art galleries. The Art School, by teaching how to produce this effect, has become a necessary factor in modern life." The catalogue went on to say: "The School of the Fine Arts Institute is the natural development of the progress of industry and its attendant culture. It expresses the virility and enthusiasm of the New West."

The first Beaux Arts balls commenced in 1917 and immediately became synonymous with the social and artistic life of Kansas City. The original ball was given by a group of practicing artists, the "Neo-Fantasionists," to raise money for schooling of young students. According to *The Kansas City Star*, "The ball, Oriental as Sultan's harem, stood the town on its ears." It was given in the old Casino between 10th and 11th Streets on Broadway. The coveted invitations were issued in imitation of Sanskrit.

The hall was decorated with a lavish hand to resemble a market place in the Far East. The ball was such a success that the Neo-Fantasionists

interfered. The ball was not given again until 1931 under Art Institute sponsorship, and from then on for twelve years the gay and colored costume events were held as a means of raising scholarship funds, with as many as a thousand guests attending. The balls usually profited the Art Institute about \$1,500.

During World War I, faculty and students sold their work for the Red Cross Relief Fund, and students made posters to encourage enlistment in the U.S. Navy. With the veterans returning in early 1919, the school experienced the largest class in its history. The Institute attracted attention from all over the country but was handicapped in that it was still hidden away in four small rooms on the top floor of an office building. Classes, which should have been held all day, were cut down to one-half periods, and only thirty pictures could be hung in the gallery at one time. The school began immediately looking for a new home. When Edwin W. Shields died in early 1920 and real estate titan J.C. Nichols became president of the board, a new home for the Art Institute was found that would make its expanding dreams possible.

A New Home and Hard Times 1920-1945



J.C. Nichols, president of the Kansas City Art Institute, 1920-1927. Under his leadership, the school changed its name from Fine Arts Institute to the

Kansas City Art Institute, moved into the Toll home and expanded its course offerings and staff of instructors. Photo courtesy of Jeannette Nichols.

Mr. Nichols' first step as president was to secure new quarters worthy of the Art Institute and to expand the membership of the school and its related activities. The charter was amended in 1920, changing the name of the Fine Arts Institute of Kansas City to the Kansas City Art Institute, and the school was moved to the Phil R. Toll home on the southwest corner of Warwick and Armour Boulevards, in a fashionable part of the city. Mr. Toll, a Kansas City lumberman, retired to his farm in Jackson County and leased his Italian Renaissance home to the school for \$3,000 a year. The building offered space for a lecture room seating 300 in the basement; the first floor was used for exhibitions; and the third and fourth floors, for classrooms. There was a large garage in the rear, which was utilized for the "luncheon department." However, an earlier historian pointed out that the Toll home was considered a temporary home for the Art Institute, which always looked forward to the creation of an art center in the city.

Nichols declared the school immediately expand its courses and staff of instructors in an effort to attract art students from the West and Midwest who were now attending Eastern schools. "This is the first move by the new board of trustees toward enlarging the scope and plan of the school as an aid in developing Kansas City as a mid-continent art center," stated Nichols.



Phil R. Toll house, home of the
Art Institute, 1920-1927.

Enrollment doubled that first year to a total of 600 students; the school's budget topped off at \$40,000; and response to a membership drive netted \$22,735, with a membership of more than 500.

Interest and respect for the Art Institute was also increasing. Virgil Barker, curator of paintings in the department of fine arts at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, was hired as the new director and began to envision tremendous possibilities in his new assignment. "With the equipment and facilities we now have and the talent we have gathered here, I see no reason why the Art Institute cannot take her rank along with any other school of its kind in the country," declared Barker, "and one from which it will be a distinction to receive a certificate." An editorial in *The Kansas City Star* evidently agreed, stating that "the new era in which it is confidently believed the Institute has entered under Mr. Barker's direction is one of the most promising things for the future of Kansas City that has come in recent years."

By 1922, classes were offered in design, illustration, interior decorating, costume design, fashion, woodcarving, drawing, painting, lettering, commercial art, sculpture and industrial arts and design. Classes in crafts, including pottery, were started a few years later. Class fees for full-time study were \$120. Daniel MacMorris, painter

and an alumnus of the school, gave \$100 for the first scholarship awarded by the Institute in 1922. Gertrude Freyman was the recipient, and she later became a member of the faculty. At a board of trustees meeting in February 1924, a report was made stating that for the first time in its recent history, the Art Institute was completely out of debt, having paid off more than \$25,000 in indebtedness over the last three years. Speaking before a Rotary luncheon in 1925, President Nichols proudly pointed out that in a little over four years the enrollment of the school had grown from 100 to more than 600 students and visitors to the shows in the Institute's gallery from 500 a year to more than 50,000.

Noted faculty members in the 1920s included John David Patrick, Randall Davey, Anthony Angarola, painting; Monte Crews, commercial illustration and decoration; Wallace Rosenbauer, modeling and crafts; and Ernest Lawson, who attended classes at the Art Institute back in 1890-91. Lawson is well known in American art history as one of the "Eight" who brought impressionism and modern art to the American consciousness and who exhibited at the famous Armory Show in New York in 1913.

In 1924, Robert A. Holland, who had been director of the City Art Museum of St. Louis (now called the St. Louis Art Museum), was

By 1922, classes were offered in design, illustration, interior decorating, costume design, fashion, woodcarving, drawing, painting, lettering, commercial art, sculpture and industrial arts

and design. Classes in crafts, including pottery, were started a few years later. Below: Sculpture class in the early 1920s, Wallace Rosenbauer, instructor.

Lower photo: Beginning class, Austin Ketcham, instructor, 1927.



hired to direct the Art Institute and created in the school a heightened energy and feeling of respectability. The Institute was becoming the art center of the region, and during the 1920s it began the Midwestern Art Shows, featuring works of artists from Missouri and Kansas.

Attendance at these exhibits and others was estimated at 10,000 people, with one-third of them coming from out of town, and attested to the broad appeal of the Institute and its gallery. Mrs. John F. Downing loaned the first large collection of books to the Art Institute in 1924 to start a

library. Included were 800 books in circulation, 38 reference books and a collection of drawing and paintings by modern masters that would be loaned to the students “as an added inspiration.” In appreciation, the library was named for her.

Earlier historians of the Art Institute recalled that in 1922 famous actor Lionel Barrymore visited the school, and students sketched him during his address. The college tasted controversy in 1923 when a painting of Jack Dempsey was shown in an exhibit. Viewers apparently did not consider a prizefighter to be a suitable subject for art.

The Vanderslice Gift

The need for more space was pressing upon the growing school. In 1927, Art Institute Board of Trustees member Howard Vanderslice, grain dealer, merchant and donor of the “Pioneer Mother” statue in Penn Valley Park, approached Frank M. Bernardin, who became president of the school following J.C. Nichols, with a plan for purchasing the August R. Meyer residence at 4415 Warwick Boulevard. Meyer, who had made a fortune in mining and other interests and was the first president of Kansas City’s Board of Park Commissioners, had built his palatial home, known as “Marburg,” in 1896, an excellent example of late 19th century Flemish Queen Anne architecture. Mrs. Meyer lowered the price of the property from \$150,000 to \$140,000

when she learned the purpose of Mr. Vanderslice’s negotiations. Nearby property owners, preferring the school as a neighbor over apartment buildings, which apparently had been mentioned, immediately pledged \$20,000, later raising the amount to \$35,000, to help defray the cost of operation for the next five years. The Institute raised the other half.

Mr. Vanderslice purchased and donated the 35-room mansion as a home for the Art Institute. It was surrounded by eight-and-one-half acres of beautifully landscaped grounds that had been planted with rare trees and shrubs from many parts of the world, including a Japanese garden of great beauty. The landscaping was created by George Kessler, a nationally renowned landscape architect and secretary of the Kansas City Parks and Boulevards Board. The location was also ideal. Due in large part to the vision of developer J.C. Nichols, who understood how important it would be for students of art and design to be able to access the collections of a great museum, the Art Institute would now be in one of the finest sections of the city, surrounded by stately old mansions and just across the street from the tract set aside for the Nelson Gallery and Mary Atkins Museum, which would open a few years later. The school utilized the greenhouses for painting and sculpture studios and the mansion for classroom, library and administrative offices.

Top photo: Vanderslice Hall, new home of the Kansas City Art Institute, 1928. The United States Department of the Interior lists Vanderslice Hall on the National Register of Historic Places.

Lower photo: Board of Governors member Howard Vanderslice, grain dealer, merchant and philanthropist, in 1927 purchased for the Art Institute the palatial home of August R. Meyer for \$140,000.



On May 26, 1928, Kansas City Art Institute students thanked Mr. Vanderslice with a dinner in his honor. In a letter addressed to the students, Howard Vanderslice stated, "It is my hope that this school may aid succeeding generations of our young people to realize the ideals of their souls and to return to the city, in the forms of great marble and great canvases, the inspirations it has given them." In honor of Mr. Vanderslice and his gift, Marburg was renamed Vanderslice Hall. Though several rooms in Vanderslice Hall have been modified over the years to accommodate its present function as office space for the Institute's administrative staff, the exterior of the mansion is essentially unaltered. The United States Department of the Interior lists Vanderslice Hall on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Institute opened in Meyer's former home in September 1928. Dr. Stratton D. Brooks, president of the University of Missouri, made the principal address dedicating the "new Kansas City Art Institute" to ever-greater service. J.C. Nichols summarized the accomplishments of Kansas City in the realm of the arts and described the needs and possibilities still ahead. He then turned to express the community's appreciation of Howard Vanderslice's generosity in making the new campus possible. The broad lawn and gardens surrounding the home proved particularly inviting for an almost perfect Indian

summer afternoon, and by the time the speeches commenced, almost 1,000 guests found seats under the shade of the trees in front of the Vanderslice Hall terrace, which served as the speakers' platform. An exhibition of Danish art was held in conjunction with the festivities, and it was estimated that more than 4,000 persons visited the Institute by the time the afternoon was over.

Mr. Vanderslice died in October 1929, leaving the Art Institute a bequest of \$250,000 in a trust fund, the income to be used for the library, student aid and the general fund, a third each for ten years, after which use of the income was unrestricted.

The following year another magnanimous board of trustees member, Mrs. U.S. Epperson, gave \$75,000 to the school to build a wing of Vanderslice Hall as a memorial to her late husband. This was later augmented, and the final gift amounted to \$90,000, including a pipe organ and piano, the latter given in memory of Miss Harriet Barse. In addition to the main hall, this beautiful building provided space in the basement for two galleries, later used as studios and presently used as academic classrooms. The building was dedicated in 1930 when 2,000 people filled the hall for the formal opening of the two galleries with two separate exhibitions. The last of the famous Epperson Megaphone

Top photo: Elizabeth (Weaver) Epperson. In 1930, she gave \$75,000 to the school to build a wing of Vanderslice Hall as a memorial to her late husband, Uriah S. Epperson.

Epperson Hall — now known as Epperson Auditorium — soon became the cultural center for the entire community with recitals, concerts, musicals and plays on its calendar, bringing hundreds

of people to the Art Institute campus. Lower photo: Uriah S. Epperson.

Minstrels, a philanthropic theatrical organization of Kansas City businessmen created thirty years earlier, attended the dedication ceremony. They joined with 400 other notables to hear the virtues of their late “director general,” U.S. Epperson, praised by Henry D. Ashley, who made the address of dedication.

Mr. Ashley sketched Mr. Epperson’s life and then dwelt upon the vision for art that had impelled Epperson, Howard Vanderslice and William Rockhill Nelson to leave benefactions to the people for art. “It is beautiful to think,” he said, “that these little things we have done may make great painters and great sculptors in our midst. It is inspiring to think, too, that men and women of Kansas City who have devoted themselves to the development of industry have not been insensible to beauty. It has been a long fight to give art to Kansas City,” he concluded, “but here, ladies and gentlemen, we have an art institute free of debt and free from municipal control and the corroding touch of politics.”

Epperson Hall — now known as Epperson Auditorium — soon became a cultural center for the entire community with recitals, concerts, musicals and plays on its calendar, bringing hundreds of people to the Art Institute campus who might have had no occasion to come otherwise. Mrs. Epperson also arranged for the building of the entrance gates on the east and west of the



Landscape class on grounds of new home of the Art Institute, 1928. The 35-room mansion was surrounded by eight-and-one-half acres of beautifully landscaped

grounds that had been planted with trees and shrubs from many parts of the world, including a Japanese garden of great beauty.



grounds, and in 1939 she purchased for the school the George T. O'Maley residence with its acre of ground at 4446 Oak Street. The O'Maley residence became known as Epperson House and was used for classrooms and studios. Also in 1939, a generous board member, William T. Kemper Jr., donated \$7,500 for a painting studio, which was added to the west of this building. The studio, now called the Kemper wing, was built according to specifications of noted muralist Thomas Hart Benton, who was then chairman of the college's painting department.

In 1928, a membership committee was organized under chairman R. Bryson Jones, and Mrs.

Mary M. Miller was asked to serve as executive secretary. One year later, a major campaign to increase membership was initiated. A period in April 1929 was designated Art Institute week; leaders of the city's business, professional and social life headed the campaign; 500 workers canvassed the city; and five leading Kansas City galleries contributed ten percent of their sales to the school. The campaign proved to be a tremendous success, adding 1,589 new members, increasing the total to 2,200, and netting the college \$35,380 to be made available for its \$90,000 operating budget. The school's financial base remained shaky, however, as it had no endowment or maintenance fund. An editorial

in the newspaper proclaimed the Art Institute was still “the poor little rich girl of art.”

The Depression

Membership and its attendant support of the Institute became even more important in the following years when the Great Depression engulfed the country, putting the school, along with other educational and cultural institutions throughout the United States, in grave financial straits. By the early 1930s, financial affairs at the Art Institute had reached a crisis. Enrollment had dropped more than half, from more than 500 students to around 250; faculty salaries were cut; and the budget was reduced to the danger point to enable the school to weather what was indeed a weak financial condition. The Art Institute was going deeper and deeper into debt, and the need for larger sums of money was drastic.

A partial solution was the Fireside Evening, the brainchild of Mrs. Albert I. Beach, first held on December 11, 1932. Thirty people attended and were seated around a glowing fireplace, with cider and doughnuts as refreshments. Art Institute students came and brought their best work, which they tacked on the walls; they told where they came from and what they hoped to do with their education. Paul Gardner, curator of the soon-to-be-opened Nelson Gallery, gave a talk on art and what a greater knowledge of it would mean to people who would try to learn

more about the subject. When word spread of the fun that was had at the first meeting, the membership grew rapidly. In the short time it took to secure 1,000 members, the figures in the treasurer's ledger had gone a long way, turning red into black.

Along with the Fireside Evenings, the newly formed Entertainment Committee, under Chairman Wallace C. Goffe, followed the board's advice and tried to keep something going at the Art Institute constantly. “We are attempting to popularize the Institute so that its influence can be felt by all,” stated Goffe in 1932, and from all accounts, that is exactly what happened. Aside from the myriad events taking place in Epperson Hall and in the school's galleries, where more than 50,000 visitors participated in the activities, highlight events of the 1930s included a six-week outdoor art class, a “Smock Snack” (all guests wore artist's smocks), Easter Egg Hunt, a Maypole Dance, tree planting ceremonies and a Sunday “Tell Me A Story Hour,” held by Mrs. Irene Sloan for children of the members. The hundreds of gallery teas, art exhibitions, Fireside suppers, auctions, lectures and outdoor activities not only helped keep interest in the school alive during a very bleak period but also made the Art Institute an important cultural force in the city.

Thomas Hart Benton, chairman of the painting department from 1935-1941, at work on "Persephone," 1938-1939. Courtesy of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri.

(Purchase: acquired in 2002 through the generosity of docent members) 2002.22. Photo by Jamison Miller of Alfred Eisenstaedt photo.



Correspondingly, the Art Institute and culture in Kansas City received a tremendous boost when the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art and Mary Atkins Museum opened in 1933, thus bringing to fruition the long held dream of an art center — the great gallery with the school nearby to benefit from its treasures. Purchases for the gallery had begun two years before it was completed, and they were displayed at the Art Institute, where hundreds of people saw them each week until they were housed in their permanent home. An agreement was immediately made between the school and the gallery whereby membership in one institution accorded free access to the other, and a certain percentage of membership fees to the Art Institute was contributed to the maintenance of the gallery collection.

Thomas Hart Benton

In 1935, the Art Institute gained national prominence when Thomas Hart Benton was hired to head the department of painting and drawing at an annual salary of \$3,000. Benton was not only one of the leading mural painters at that time in the United States, but was also one of the most powerful personalities in American art. A Missourian by birth, he was an outstanding figure in the group of painters and critics who sought to develop a characteristic American art from the traditions and point of view of the Middle West.

The announcement of Benton's arrival created quite a stir at the Institute. The immediate impact was that enrollment increased to 438 students, the highest since 1931. Several of Benton's New York students accompanied him to Kansas City, and several students who planned to go to New York in the fall announced they would remain at the Institute and study with Benton. W. Rickett Fillmore, the president of the board, stated in the newspaper in October 1935 that "more enthusiasm today had been shown in the opening of the Institute than ever before."

Benton's six-year tenure at the school was a time of great productivity for him and his students, as well as a time of controversy. While here, Benton painted his famous mural at the Missouri Capitol in Jefferson City, assisted by students in preliminary work at the Art Institute. He also completed his famous and controversial painting "Persephone," symbolizing the despoliation of the land in the Midwest, while teaching classes in the "Greenhouse," which was used as painting studios during this period. The Maltese kitten in

Benton's six-year tenure at the school was a time of great productivity for him and his students, as well as a time of controversy.

Persephone's flower basket was a stray adopted by Benton's students at the Art Institute. Its diet consisted, in part, of spoiled eggs that could not be used to make tempera.

As a teacher, Benton was very popular with students. "He loved us and we loved him," recalled one of his students, Earl Bennett, who hailed Benton as an inspiring teacher. "He conveyed to us his sensuous involvement with color, materials and textures. He'd get terribly excited about a milkweed in the fall with its glowin gold interior. He showed us how milkweed could be sexy," Bennett remembered. "A fire burned in that little old man." The board of governors also regarded him as a good, even a great instructor, and the Institute's director, Rossiter Howard, characterized him as a "great master of design and color and a splendid professor."

In 1940, a Paramount newsreel camera moved into Benton's advanced painting studio at the Institute to officially celebrate National Art Week. The same year, Benton arranged for an exhibition of painting and prints by fifteen advanced students at the Fifth Avenue headquarters of the Association of American Artists in New York. Among those whose works were in the show was William McKim, who later served for many years as a member of the faculty. Critics praised the show, pointing out that each work revealed a strong influence of Benton. This

is said to be the first time an out of town art school had an exhibition of its students' work in New York under professional auspices.

However, not everyone appreciated Benton's service and notoriety at the Institute, and efforts were made twice to terminate his contract. In 1938, Howard E. Huselton, an early director of the school, publicly attacked Benton's book *An Artist in America* as "sensual, gross, profane and vulgar," castigated his Missouri Capitol mural for displaying Kansas City notables with "hunched shoulders and fat legs" and stated that Benton was not a fit moral leader for the young and therefore his contract as professor at the Art Institute should not be renewed.

With the help of students, the alumni association, several colleagues and various members of the board, Benton was able to resist Huselton's efforts. In an interview in *The Kansas City Star*, Benton expressed his desire to continue teaching at the Art Institute and declared, "The whole affair was simply a joke to me." However, in May 1941, the board voted again on renewal of his contract after some remarks Benton made in New York denigrating art museum directors and stating that if he had it his way, there would be no art museums. Instead, he declared he would sell his paintings to "saloons, bawdy houses, Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs and Chambers of Commerce — even women's clubs." Pressed by

The Beaux Arts Ball, in the Art Institute's Golden Anniversary year, was particularly exciting because it was featured in *Life* magazine's "Life Goes to a Party" section.

Famous artists Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry and Grant Wood were there and chose the winning costumes of the "Arabian Nights" theme, though there were those who

objected to the scantiness of the costumes they selected. Below: Robert Mayes puts a finishing touch to a costume worn by Marty Nichols, wife of Clyde Nichols Jr.

the board to defend his remarks, Benton responded, "I just say in public what everybody else says in private." The board, however, felt differently, declaring that Benton's point of view was at variance with the basic educational policy of the school. Not even a demonstration of some twenty of Benton's students and former students, including William McKim, could save him this time, and his colorful and exciting tenure at the Institute was thus terminated.

Golden Anniversary

In 1938, the Art Institute celebrated its Golden Anniversary with an impressive exhibition of alumni work that featured thirty-seven different paintings of the "dean" of Kansas City art and former instructor at the school George Van Millet. The show included works by such well-known luminaries as Alexander J. Kostellow, John Steuart Curry, Daniel MacMorris and Ernest Lawson. The well-attended and much publicized event was hosted by Mrs. Fred C. Vincent and Mrs. Edwin W. Shields. The Beaux Arts Ball, in that anniversary year, was particularly exciting because it was featured in *Life* magazine's "Life Goes to a Party" section.

Famous artists Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry and Grant Wood were there and chose the winning costumes of the "Arabian Nights" theme, though there were those who objected to the scantiness of the costumes they selected. Classes were offered that year in paint-



ing, sculpture, advertising and industrial design, illustration, graphic arts and interior design and decoration. There were 315 full-time day students, with evening classes and those for children bringing the total enrollment to more than 500. The curriculum called for thirty-two hours a week for each student, with a certificate given for three years of satisfactory work, a diploma for four. Scholarships totaling \$2,200 were awarded to high school seniors in an annual art competition. The faculty consisted of eighteen members, ten of whom were full time with an average salary of less than \$2,000.

Lower left: Beaux Arts Ball,
1938, "A Night in Bagdad,"
Julia Byard escorted by Robert
Mayes, instructor in costume
design at the Art Institute.



Lower right: Art Institute
benefactor William T. Kemper Jr.
with Mrs. John J. Fennelly, a
hostess for the event.



In the decade and a half following World War II, the Art Institute experienced dramatic changes that would set the standards for art education in Kansas City for many years to come.

Opposite page: Watercolor class, 1948.

World War II

Time magazine, in October 1940, credited the Art Institute with being the first school to inaugurate a civilian and industrial research camouflage training program. War clouds were hovering over the nation, and the Institute was moving to meet the demands. An auction of works contributed by local artists raised \$1,300 for the Red Cross relief program, and the Beaux Arts Ball that year promoted the sales of defense bonds. The fashion design department furnished approved uniforms for defense workers, and the Institute began training design draftsmen for airplane companies, tool design, etc. Director Keith Martin revised each department of the school to prepare students to meet the government wartime needs. A 1943 editorial in *The Kansas City Star* praised the Art Institute for gaining an “essential” rating for the school from the War Manpower Commission and stated that “the present war has certainly demonstrated that the professional artist is engaged in an activity essential to the public good.”

send students majoring in art education to the Institute for their final year and created a master’s degree program with Kansas Citian Katrina Baldwin as the first recipient. When Fletcher Martin was hired as painting instructor in 1941, the newspapers mentioned him as a worthy successor to “such men as Anthony Angarola, Ernest Lawson, Randall Davey, Ross Braught and Thomas Hart Benton.” However, the Institute, like all colleges and universities, soon felt the pinch of war. In the days following Pearl Harbor, Vanderslice Hall was closed because of fuel shortages, and Epperson Hall was housing the entire school. By 1944, enrollment was down to 34 full-time students, and the graduating class that year only numbered seven. Both students and faculty had gone to war, leaving the college often in the red and frequently operating on borrowed money. As Mary M. Miller, long-time membership secretary, remembered years later, “From every standpoint, we just muddled through.”

The budget for 1941 was \$68,910 with total enrollment reaching 632 students. The following year the Institute took pleasure in announcing to its members the creation of the Charles T. Thompson Emergency Fund of \$5,000, which represented the first substantial increase in the school’s endowment in several years. The school initiated a plan whereby nearby colleges would

The Post War Years 1945-1960



In the decade and a half following World War II, the Art Institute experienced dramatic changes that would set the standards for art education in Kansas City for many years to come. With the end of the war in view, the board was foresighted enough to anticipate greatly increased enrollment and therefore made plans to increase the faculty, remove old buildings and have sketches drawn for new ones. Fortunately, there was a bequest by Junius B. Irving of the Irving-Pitt Manufacturing Company for \$140,000, which could be allotted to new buildings. Renovation programs started in 1945 with the addition of a large painting studio and two smaller studios to the fashion design building (Epperson House). In 1944, the Institute had received from Wallace

C. Goffe a gift of the former John C. Glover residence, located across Warwick Boulevard from the main grounds. With \$15,000 coming from the Irving bequest, it was remodeled as a dormitory housing thirty-three female students. A dormitory committee was immediately formed to supervise the renovations, and the building was officially opened February 24, 1945.

The Glover Carriage House was also remodeled as a home for painting instructor Edward Laning, and in the rear of the dormitory two buildings were constructed for faculty housing with aid from the Federal Public Housing Authority. To the Irving bequest was added \$150,000, subscribed by friends of the Art

Institute, and work was begun on two new buildings. The program was delayed, however, pending approval by the Civilian Production Authority and later by a strike.

Earlier historians pointed out that this building program was especially significant, for until this time, the school's physical plant had been principally based on the acquisition and renovation of old houses. It was now to have three buildings designed to specifications, taking into account the needs of teachers and students. The first, the William T. Kemper studio, was built in 1947, named after the former president of the board, who had financially contributed so much during an extremely difficult period. It housed painting and lithography studios. The other two, designed by David Benton Runnells, head of the industrial design department, were finally completed in 1948 at a total cost of \$330,000. The Irving Building contained seven studios for the industrial design department and included a drawing studio seating 150 students, which later became known as Irving Amphitheater and was then used for art history classes and other campus lectures. The other new building was named after William Volker, "honoring the man who did so much for so many years, especially in the Depression period, when financial support was extremely meager." It contained two studios, one for sculpture and one for ceramics. As a result of the additional buildings, the curriculum was

broadened. Courses were added in photography and printmaking. In 1944 the name of the school was changed to Kansas City Art Institute and School of Design.

Meanwhile, an extensive renovation program was under way on the older buildings. Mrs. Delon A. Williams was chairman of the House Committee, and it was under her supervision that a major alteration was made on the main floor of Vanderslice Hall. The lobby and interior of Epperson Hall also were altered. A room on the first floor of Vanderslice Hall was designated to house the permanent collection given the Art Institute by generous patrons. False ceilings were installed in the three exhibition galleries to make possible indirect lighting. The Art Center brought forward a unique service to the city and students by offering for sale the work of American artists, including faculty members and those students who were considered to be sufficiently advanced.

The G.I. Tide

With the war over and the enactment of the G.I. Bill of Rights of 1945, the anticipated leap of enrollment began, and for the next five years the Institute was, for the first time since the war commenced, humming with students, more than half of them veterans. By 1949, there were 638 full-time day students from all areas of the country and several foreign nations, with a total

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Top row left: Sculpture class, 1948. Top row right: Ceramics class, 1948. Lower photo: Graphic arts class, 1948.



In 1948, famous abstract artist Robert Rauschenberg was attending classes in the college's interior design department.

The first full-fledged program of commencement exercises was held in June 1948. That year's class was also noteworthy because it produced the first and only Art Institute yearbook.

Top photo: Industrial design class, 1948. Lower photo: Fashion design class, 1948.

Opposite page: Fashion show on campus, 1948.



enrollment in excess of 900. Registration in the first-year classes was closed two months before the opening of the school term.

With this surge in enrollment, additional housing was desperately needed. Temporary buildings were set up on the grounds, and a house formerly used as a nurses' home at 4343 Oak Street was leased as an additional dormitory to house thirty-one women students. The new buildings under construction were not yet ready in February 1947, and the school quite literally ran out of room. For a brief period, the school expanded across Oak Street, and almost the entire lower floor of the Nelson Gallery and its auditorium were used to accommodate classes.

This was also the year in which the school became qualified as an institution of collegiate level, when, in 1947, the state of Missouri granted a revision of the charter for offering professional degrees in art. Although students could still pursue and obtain a four-year diploma, the degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts or Applied Arts would now be available for students who completed the requirements for the regular four-year curriculum and academic courses equivalent to thirty credit hours in some accredited college or university. To make this as feasible as possible, academic instructors from the University of Kansas City and Kansas City Junior College taught part-time at the Institute, which now had a fine-arts faculty of fifty and twenty-four part-





time members. The college also offered a master's degree for those students holding either a B.A. in art or B.F.A. degree. The operation was met by tuition of \$300 a year, membership fees and income from membership that now stood at 1,350. The property of the school was valued at more than \$1 million; the endowment fund amounted to \$325,000.

In 1948, famous abstract artist Robert Rauschenberg was attending classes in the college's interior design department, whose studios occupied the third floor of Vanderslice Hall. An official Institute trademark or symbol was adopted, and an abstract design with the lines forming the letters "A.I." was used at the gateways of the school, on letterheads and in publicity materials. The first full-fledged program of commencement exercises was held in June 1948. That year's class was also noteworthy because it produced the first and only Art Institute yearbook. An appraisal in the annual declared: "Today the Institute has risen to new heights; it has grown stronger and stronger until it is now one of the leading art schools in the country."

In the summer of 1948, the Sketch Box Committee was organized by Mrs. Leon T. Swan to increase Art Institute membership and to provide activities of interest to young women. At the close of the school year in 1949, President Wallace C. Goffe proudly reported that the

school was out of debt and was operating in the black; it had its largest graduating class, with six master's degrees and ninety-nine bachelor's degrees being awarded at commencement, which for the first time was being held in the Mary Atkins auditorium at the Nelson Gallery (now the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art).

In April 1949, there was a reorganization of the administration. It was apparent to Institute officials that a businessman with his own affairs to manage, serving as president of the board, could no longer devote the time that was demanded by the now manifold operations of the school. Mr. W. M. Symon was made executive vice president "with complete authority over educational policies as well as business affairs," and the president of the board became the chairman. Dr. J.B. Smith became dean of education, and the position of director, which had been held by Wallace Rosenbauer since 1944, was eliminated. In practice, however, an earlier history of the Institute noted, "things did not change very much, and it was not until 1959 that the administration was organized on conventional educational lines."

One significant change did take place during this period when, in 1948, Leonard Pryor became the first African-American to attend the Institute. After graduating with a major in painting in 1952, Pryor's career stretched in many directions. He taught high-school art for seven-

Below: In the late 1940s, first-year design students met in the two large studios beneath the auditorium in Epperson Hall. According to the 1948-49

catalog, "Students are introduced to a great variety of media — black and white, pencil, crayon, ink, scratch board, water color, gouache, tempora and pastel."

teen years in the Kansas City, Missouri public schools, became chair of the art department and taught extension courses at the Art Institute. From 1968-1972, he served with distinction as academic dean at KCAI. In 1972, he returned to the public schools, first as an art consultant, later as the district coordinator of art education and finally as coordinator for the fine and performing art departments.

The Beloved Ted Larson and the 1950s

In 1949, an honorary membership in the Institute, the only one ever given, was bestowed upon a unique individual who contributed as much to the school as anyone in its history. His name was Oscar (Ted) Larson, and he had been hired in 1921 as superintendent of buildings and grounds. Unofficially, however, he was known as the "dean of students" and the operator and manager of the famous "tea room." Larson was the pioneer and promoter of the "working scholarship plan" on campus whereby a student would sweep studios, wash dishes or double as a gardener in exchange for an education. Many a student in financial straits was given a hand by the "dean;" twenty-six students were on this plan in 1949, and 600 students over the years benefited from this program.

His tea room was made popular not only by his secretly blended beverage, but also by the continuous art exhibition of student work, which



Larson was careful to change every two weeks. This mild-mannered, obliging man sympathized with students, fed them when they could not afford it and furthered their work in every way possible. When Wallace C. Goffe gave his home to the Institute for a women's dormitory, the question of a housemother arose. Finding none available, Larson was appointed to fill the gap. He was the best man at numerous Art Institute weddings, and once he gave a bride away in a ceremony at the women's dorm. By 1950, when he retired, Mr. Larson needed a museum of his

own to house the thousand art works that were his gifts from students. On his death, these works were turned over to the Institute, which kept a few. Others were sold through the Fireside auction, and proceeds were applied to the Larson scholarship, which was set up in his honor.

In February 1950, enrollment at the Institute reached its peak, totaling more than 1,000 day and evening students, and the commencement that spring was the largest in its history, with 139 graduates receiving professional degrees. Soon after, however, the veterans on the G.I. Bill completed their schooling or dropped out, and the Korean War caused a further deterioration in enrollment. By 1952, enrollment had dropped in half, with 230 day students and 210 attending at night. Again it was a struggle on the part of the board of governors and trustees to keep the Institute afloat. The instructors of academic subjects were not re-engaged, and arrangements were made with Kansas City Junior College to provide academic instruction for Art Institute students.

There were at the same time, however, positive developments that strengthened and advanced the institution. The school's new buildings were featured in six different architectural magazines, and the Art Institute was one of six colleges selected to submit student designs to the organi-

zation "International Fashions." In 1954, a women's membership committee formed for the purpose of securing new members for KCAI and new funds for the operating budget and promoting activities to interest the community in the school. The committee in December 1963 took the name "Paleteers," when Muriel Kauffman coined the name for the new organization. It was also during this period that Josephine Hughes as comptroller and Mary Woods as dean of students and later director of admissions, became mainstays of the Institute, loved and admired by the many students, faculty and staff with whom they came into contact. Jo Hughes retired after twenty-seven years of service in 1975 and was given an honorary degree by the Institute. Mary Woods, as director of alumni relations, assembled an impressive alumni directory in 1970, noteworthy as it was the first in the school's 85-year history. She retired in 1976 and was also given an honorary degree.

As the college's 75th anniversary approached, great plans were made for celebrating its Diamond Jubilee. On November 1, 1959, all doors to the studios and classrooms remained open for the afternoon so that the public could observe the Art Institute's functions and accomplishments. There were student-conducted tours of the campus and a display of student art. The main event was an exhibit of the works of outstanding alumni, among them Walt Disney's

In February 1950, enrollment at the Institute reached its peak, totalling more than 1,000 day and evening students, and the commencement that spring was the largest in its history, with

139 graduates receiving professional degrees. In 1958, the Institute secured formal accreditation from the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.

“Art in Animation.” Mounted at a cost of more than \$200,000, the assembly illustrated every step and phase in the making of the Disney film enchantments. *The Kansas City Times* applauded the school on its anniversary, stating: “From a humble start in a dozen living rooms, the Kansas City Art Institute has grown to national stature. Now in its 75th year, our oldest cultural institution is still moving ahead. The Art Institute clearly does not show its age.”

Initial Moves Toward Accreditation

It was also during this period that the Institute found itself embroiled in an educational crisis, as it was not fully equipped to face the challenges of the future within the mainstream of higher education in America. The challenge was twofold: to bring up to date the philosophy and educational objectives of the school and second, to establish a program of growth. As early as September 1950, the school had begun to face difficulties because of lack of accreditation. The University of Missouri, for example, refused to recognize its credits, and the lack of student mobility was becoming an ever-increasing problem. At this time the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools did not recognize technical schools, and graduates of KCAI had to complete six credit hours in a recognized graduate school before being qualified to teach in a North Central member institution. The Kansas City Art Institute was not the only art

school facing the problem, however, and all recognized that it was essential that some rating be gained. The National Association of Schools of Design and the National Art Education Association were developing a joint program aiming toward accreditation of art schools.

In November 1956, in a report on the Institute before the Mercury Club, David L. Strout, dean of the college, expressed the determination of the board, Mr. Symon and himself that the Institute should become an accredited American college. Having the original vision of a collegiate institution for artists, Dean Strout then outlined a number of improvements necessary to the program in order to gain recognition by the North Central Association. He stated that the Institute was in a process of self-evaluation and that there was a need to “redefine our aims and purposes.” Having a strong liberal arts background and appreciation of these courses himself, Strout felt intensely that the program should be expanded in the area of general education, which he believed “was valuable to the creative artist.” In the spring of 1957, the question of consolidating the University of Kansas City, the Kansas City Conservatory of Music and the Art Institute was studied, but the plan was rejected by the board in favor of retaining KCAI as an autonomous institution. The decision was then reached to discontinue the awarding of master’s degrees and to concentrate on upgrading the undergraduate

Below: Softball game on campus
lawn, 1950s.



program, to list night courses as non-credit and to upgrade the summer-school program. The library was to be improved, and the program for student social and recreational improvement was to be accelerated.

The final obstacle for accreditation was removed in August 1958, when the North Central Association declared schools of art eligible for memberships if they met certain academic standards. With the help of Father Paul C. Reinert, president of St. Louis University and head of the

North Central Association, a survey team from North Central came to the Institute and gave the school a valuable guide for meeting accreditation requirements. A new administrative setup was instituted in May 1959 with Harry M. Gambrel the chairman of the board of governors; Richard H. Brunell, president of the school; and Dr. Eliot S. Berkley, a member of the faculty of general studies for three years, appointed to the newly created post of dean of administration.

The Vision of Andrew W. Morgan, the 1960s

America in the 1960s was a time of change and turmoil, and during this period the Art Institute became a dynamic place of expanding dreams and possibilities fulfilled. By July 1960, the board of governors, after reviewing the educational needs and objectives of the Institute, felt secure to undertake a new program and select a new president from outside the KCAI community. Although former dean David Strout had moved on to the Rhode Island School of Design, he maintained an avid interest in getting the Art Institute accredited. When he heard of the presidential search, he called a former student of his at Kenyon College and now friend Andrew Morgan, artist and chairman of the art department at the University of Mississippi. Morgan became president of the Art Institute in the fall of 1960 and within two months presented to the board an ambitious ten-year program, modeled on the Knox College plan, prepared with a Ford Foundation subsidy.

Within three years the growth of the Institute was substantial. Morgan reorganized the board of governors and auxiliary committees needed to have a more active and meaningful relationship with the school. He worked with the board to realize the need for facilities and staff adequate to provide modern services in support of the educational purposes of the Institute. A major step in this endeavor occurred in June 1962 when the board authorized Kivett and Myers to

develop a Student Living Center. A loan of \$820,000 was secured from the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency. One wing of the twin building would accommodate eighty men, the other eighty-four women. A joint lounge and cafeteria connected the wings, and the building included a greatly expanded library and the Charlotte Crosby Kemper Gallery, which afforded space for an increased scope of exhibitions and attendance. William T. Kemper, Jr., a member of the board of trustees from 1933 until his death in 1989, along with his two brothers, R. Crosby Kemper Sr. and James M. Kemper Sr., established the gallery in honor of their mother. A building fund of \$150,000 was raised by the Friends of Art Institute for equipment and improvements of the physical plant, including the expansion of Epperson Hall and the restoration of Vanderslice Hall more in keeping with its original décor. The restoration was to be accomplished through fund-raising projects by the newly formed Vanderslice Committee, under the chairmanship of Mrs. Leon T. Swan and through gifts from generous members and friends of the college.

Missouri Senator Stuart Symington was the principal speaker at the groundbreaking ceremony of the Student Living Center on October 29, 1962, with 300 people attending. The senator praised the accomplishments of the Institute and declared that “the school has served the city well

William T. Kemper, a member of the board of trustees from 1933 until his death in 1989, along with his two brothers, R. Crosby Kemper Sr. and James M. Kemper Sr., established a gallery in honor of their mother.

Below: An opening reception at the Charlotte Crosby Kemper Gallery (now the Destination Gallery) in the Student Living Center.



in the transformation of a frontier town to a modern metropolis with a great future.” After many frustrations, the building was officially opened in the fall of 1963 with dedicatory remarks by Charles E. Curry, presiding judge of the Jackson County Court, followed by a reception for members and friends of the college. The Kemper Gallery’s inaugural exhibit was the paintings of Charles Burchfield, selected by William Paul, newly appointed director of exhibitions.

Conditions for student life were markedly improved with the new residence hall, a student health program and expanded studio and library hours. Faculty salaries were raised eighteen percent in 1962-63 over the previous academic year, with a \$6,200 minimum for all teachers with ten years of experience. Teachers Retirement Insurance was adopted for both faculty and staff, and a program of sabbatical leave was initiated with painting professor Wilbur Niewald the first recipient. In 1962, a bequest from the will of Charles T. Thompson added

After 1960, all students who entered on a full-time four-year basis as candidates for the Bachelor of Fine Arts degree were required to complete 136 hours for graduation, with thirty

of these hours needed in general studies. In 1964, the Kansas City Art Institute and School of Design became fully accredited, one of the 470 member schools of the North Central Association, its

credits exchangeable with these colleges and universities and all other major educational institutions in the country. Below: David Dunlap with his foundation studio class.

Lower photo: Liberal arts class discussion on campus lawn; sculpture by Dale Eldred in background.



\$50,000 to the development fund for a permanent structure to house the Art Institute's book, journal and slide collection. The new library was named in his honor.

President Morgan also raised admissions and academic standards for the school whereby all entering students were screened, each required to appear in person for a faculty interview and to take a college qualification exam. After 1960, all students who entered on a full-time four-year basis as candidates for the Bachelor of Fine Arts degree were required to complete 136 hours for graduation, with thirty of these hours needed in general studies. The curriculum was also completely reorganized under President Morgan and additions made to the staff. Photography in the graphic arts department under chairman Eugene Jemison was expanded; sculpture under chairman Dale Eldred became one of the best equipped such departments in the United States, with Eldred and his students building much of the machinery themselves; and ceramics was added and soon became an autonomous department under chairman Ken Ferguson. The fashion design course was eliminated, and the department of design for interiors was placed under the department of industrial design with Vern Johnson as chairman. Wilbur Niewald headed the department of drawing and painting; Wayne DuQuoin chaired the department of graphic design; William McKim, the foundation

department; and general studies was enlarged and strengthened as a basic part of the degree program, initially chaired by Dr. Eliot Berkley.

In order to increase communication with community institutions, the Art Institute joined in the spring of 1962 with eight area colleges in chartering the Kansas City Regional Council for Higher Education for the purpose of common studies and cooperative actions and exchange. Under this program, Institute students would have access to courses and programs in these institutions, and, in turn, Kansas City Art Institute courses were open to students in member colleges.

By 1963 the school was in a stronger financial position. Additional services increased expenditures twenty-three percent from 1957 to 1963, but total income for the period increased twenty-nine percent. The Art Institute was practically breaking even on an operational basis and was not quite so dependent on gifts and grants, which provided fifteen percent of the operating budget. Scholarships also increased dramatically when, in December 1963, the Ford Foundation awarded the college a \$55,000 grant over a five-year period for scholarships up to \$1,500 a year to talented students in painting and sculpture. Although the endowment had increased minimally in thirty-five years, income from all other sources in the first half of 1963, including gifts

to the building fund totaling \$266,000, almost equaled all income received during the entire fiscal year of 1957-58.

Accreditation

With the plan for accreditation now complete, the Institute became a candidate for membership in the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools and was examined by the North Central team in December 1963. The committee of three submitted a favorable report, and President Morgan was asked to appear before the North Central commission in Chicago on April 5, 1964. Three days later, the Kansas City Art Institute and School of Design became fully accredited, one of the 470 member schools of the North Central Association, its credits exchangeable with these colleges and universities and all other major educational institutions in the country. The Institute became one of only twenty-seven art schools and colleges in the United States with both professional and college accreditation. The approval was made retroactive to 1960 so that the graduates of the class of 1964 would receive the accredited degree.

President Morgan called this action “the most important milestone in the school’s history” and pointed out that this would likely result in an accelerated program of expansion at the Art Institute. “Accreditation will open the door for

us,” he stated, “to invaluable private foundation support in the form of research grants, scholarships and matching grants for capital improvements.” In addition, the college would also now be eligible for both state and federal grants for capital improvements. Morgan and Earle K. Radford, chairman of the board of governors, predicted that accreditation would be a great impetus to increased enrollment, with possibly 600 students by 1970. *The Kansas City Star* editorialized on June 28, 1964: “It was, in short, one of the most eventful years in the seventy-nine-year history of the school. It may someday be looked back on as the year the Art Institute came of age.”

Years of Expansion

Morgan’s optimistic predictions became reality for, within three years, the school had already accomplished much of the 1960 plan for ten years of growth. By the opening of the 1967-68 school year, full-time student enrollment swelled to more than 500, the faculty was increased to 40 full-time members, tuition was now \$1,000 a year and the college’s operating budget was hiked to more than one million dollars. Of the past year’s graduating class, some sixty percent were accepted for graduate study, nearly half of them on scholarship, fellowships or as teaching assistants. A record number of community projects with business and industry were taking place, and the Art Institute proved its leadership in the

field of visual education by initiating the first national organization for independent professional schools of art — the Union of Independent Colleges of Art (UICA) — with Andrew Morgan serving at its first President. The UICA included the best independent colleges of art in the country, and its headquarters were to be located in Kansas City.

A new million dollar building program was announced, and, when completed, the structures would be grouped in clearly defined areas so that each department would enjoy, in Morgan's words, "an environment of its own." The department of design, which included product, shelter, package and environmental design, was to be housed in one new building on the northeast corner of the campus, across Warwick Boulevard. Facilities for graphic design — communication through design, typography and photography — would be expanded in the Irving Building, and the Lewis Donaldson home on Oak Street would be used for additional parking and faculty studios. Sculpture studios were also expanded, as well as facilities for printmaking, and the freshman foundation building, just recently constructed, would now be air-conditioned.

Under Morgan and the newly appointed dean of the college, John W. Lottes, the school also reformed its curriculum, narrowing its majors

down to five: ceramics, sculpture, graphic design, industrial design and painting and print-making. The foundation department reorganized and centralized its faculty under Samia Haleby, then Richard Mattsson, pioneering the first program of its kind for art schools in America. At the same time, the liberal arts department, under George Burris, became an enlarged, strengthened and autonomous entity within the school and was now considered an integral and vital part of the educational experience. In 1966, the name of the college was shortened from "Kansas City Art Institute and School of Design" to "Kansas City Art Institute."

Campus Life in the 1960s

Campus life in the 1960s was filled with both merriment and protest. In 1963, Walt Disney was brought back to the place he once called home for an honorary degree and to relive some old and valuable memories. President Morgan expressed the school's pleasure in hosting Disney in stating, "He has honored and stimulated us by his presence here. He has, for us, always been a source of pride. Tonight he is a good omen in a time of great promise." Disney, who stated, "I owe my formative knowledge to the Kansas City Art Institute," toured Vanderslice Hall, visited the painting studios in Epperson House and spent time in an industrial design classroom talking with students and faculty.

In 1963, Walt Disney was brought back to the place he once called home for an honorary degree and to relive some old and valuable memories.

Top photo: Walt Disney accompanied by President Andrew Morgan and Earle Radford, chairman of the board of governors.

Lower photo: Walt Disney visits Saturday children's classes fondly remembering those in which he participated from 1915–1917.



Student protest commenced in the spring of 1964 when President Morgan was hanged in effigy over dissatisfaction among some students concerning the appointment of a certain staff member as a visiting teacher for the coming year.

The following year, Dean Eliot Berkley received the same treatment when students complained over noisy conditions in the dormitory and of not being permitted to move out without dropping their enrollment for the next semester.

Below: President Morgan and his wife, Peggie, enjoy a campus elephant ride in celebration of "Morgan Day," 1970.

The school was radically changed from the institution Andrew Morgan had found just ten years before.

Protest assumed a more serious dimension in October 1969, when, in observance of the National Moratorium on the war in Vietnam, classes were cancelled for the day at the Institute after the student body unanimously passed the resolution, and a sizable majority of the faculty ratified it.

When Andrew Morgan announced in the fall that he was leaving the Institute in the spring of 1970 to go back to teaching, the school was radically changed from the institution he had found just ten years before. Full-time enrollment had since doubled to 547, with 41 full-time faculty members and an average salary of more than \$9,000. Library volumes now totaled more than 17,000, with 19,000 slides in the collection. The annual operating budget was \$1,467,572; annual gifts and grants came to \$750,000. With the completion of the building program in 1970, the size of the physical plant had also doubled from what it had been just ten years before.

In appreciation for all that Morgan had accomplished for the school, 500 students hosted a day-long surprise retirement party called "Morgan Day," with an elephant ride for President Morgan and his wife and a helicopter which, after showering the scene with ticker-tape and confetti, took Morgan aloft for a view of the campus he so ably presided over the last ten years. Bands played on the Vanderslice patio,



and students on the grassy mall below joined hands for an impromptu message: "Love." In an interview years after the event, Morgan stated that he was very touched by this show of affection and referred to it as "an overwhelming, gratifying, marvelous experience."

Upon leaving Kansas City, Morgan exhibited justifiable pride in the institution he did so much in developing. "Today's campus is recognized to be one of the finest enjoyed by art students in the United States," he told a reporter for *The Kansas City Star*. "Our faculty has grown with the facilities. They are widely known for educational innovation and creative skill. I believe that our students are among the most vigorous and visually talented to be found anywhere." Thanks in large part to the vision and outstanding leadership of Andrew W. Morgan, this dream of a strong position of excellence and independence had become reality.

The Presidency of John W. Lottes: The Art Institute Comes of Age 1970-1983

In April 1970, John W. Lottes was named to succeed Andrew Morgan as president and assumed the office in July of that year. A former member of the design faculty and dean of the college from 1964 to 1968, Lottes had left the Institute to become the director of planning and development at the Corcoran Gallery and School of Art in Washington, D.C. A year later, he was appointed vice president for academic affairs at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland. A combination designer, educator and businessman, Lottes, just thirty-six years old, proved to be an excellent choice to lead the Art Institute to a period of security and self-assurance in which the school matured and came of age.

At his inaugural address before the board of governors, Lottes declared three goals for the school: to raise enrollment to 600 students and then to set that figure as maximum; to concentrate on the quality of the Institute's educational program; and finally, to foster a cultural, educational and aesthetic impact on Kansas City emanating from the Art Institute. Lottes foresaw an increasing interrelationship as the students and faculty would draw upon the resources of the city and return to the community products and services. "My particular objective here is to begin to realize the advantage of being in Kansas City," stated Lottes and reciprocally, "the school, through an educational role, through the work

produced here, can show what a quality life is."

Within three years, the Art Institute, under Lottes' direction, was making substantial inroads in all three areas. Enrollment for fall semester 1973 was 593 students coming from forty states and several foreign countries, with a full-time faculty of fifty. The annual operating budget was nearly \$2 million, with student tuition holding at \$2,200 per year. In order to meet the overriding concern of making the school financially viable through fund-raising, private support for the college from the Kansas City community was increased thirty percent during the fiscal year, and during these first three years a \$253,724 accumulated deficit was reduced to \$76,500.

In order to enhance the quality of the school's educational program, Lottes made some key decisions during his early years as president to take photography out of the graphic design department and create an autonomous photography/cinematography department under Lloyd Schnell. The president combined the industrial design and graphic design departments into a single comprehensive design program under Rob Roy Kelly and housed it entirely in the now expanded Irving Building. The photography department and printmaking and lithography studios would be located in the new East Building, along with a media center, the slide

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Below left: John Lottes, president of the Art Institute, 1970-1983. Below right: Class video project, early 1970s.



library and the central shop. In 1972, Steve Whitacre was appointed chairman of the foundation department when Richard Mattsson resigned from that position and during his extended tenure as chair brought more organization, clarity and refinement to the program along with developing a highly skilled and committed faculty that helped the program mature into one of the finest in the nation. The liberal arts department was also strengthened during this time with the addition of several new faculty members and an expanded and diverse curriculum. By the middle of the 1970s, fiber was added to the curriculum as a major in the newly created crafts department under Ken Ferguson. First taught in the basement of the ceramics building, the department received its own studio space in 1978, when a wing was added on to the foundation structure.

During the 1970s, President Lottes also expanded and strengthened the library and other learning resources that provided support to the instructional program of the Institute. By 1978, the library's holdings exceeded 28,000 book titles, more than twice the holdings of the 1969 collection. A media center was established in 1973 with a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to centralize campus audio-visual services and provide for the growth and use of the slide collection, which by 1978 had grown to 37,000. In addition to the slide collection, the center also had audio-visual equipment valued at more than \$35,000, which was available for faculty and student checkout. During 1976, the additional service of a student work archive was established to provide an ongoing record of work created at the Institute, which by 1983 contained approximately 800 slides.

Top photo: Chairman of the painting department Wilbur Niewald instructs students, early 1980s. Niewald and Ken Ferguson were mainstays of the Institute for decades, and for

their exceptional teaching and leadership both were awarded the title of professor emeritus, in 1992 and 1996, respectively.

Lower photo: Chairman of the ceramics department Ken Ferguson instructs a student, mid-1980s.



Below: Fiber professor Jane Lackey with Sherry Cromwell-Lacy, director of exhibitions, setting up an exhibit in the Kemper Gallery, early 1980s. Cromwell-Lacy organized more than 100 exhibitions of works

by nationally and internationally known professional contemporary artists, as well as museum-quality collections of cultural and historical significance.

The central shop was established in 1971 to provide facilities, technical advice and safe working conditions for all students, faculty and staff. Over the years, the shop added equipment and tools and by 1978 had an investment of more than \$45,000. The service of the central shop consisted mainly in supplying and maintaining the machinery necessary to perform virtually all fundamental operations needed for wood, plastic and metal fabrication. Central shop services were integrated into instructional programs through a mandatory freshman shop orientation. Design and sculpture students were the major users of the facility, but it was open to all students, faculty and staff who exhibited a basic knowledge of the safe operation of the machines. A photography lab was also opened as the only service administered by a studio department. Its services were required to support the photography program and were extended to the entire Kansas City Art Institute community.

Sherry Cromwell-Lacy was appointed director of exhibitions for the Kemper Gallery in 1973 and in that capacity organized more than 100 exhibitions of works by nationally and internationally known professional contemporary artists, as well as museum-quality collections of cultural and historical significance. A student gallery was established in 1980 “to simulate the proliferation and exchange of ideas and images within the Art Institute community.” The gallery was located



adjacent to the Kemper Gallery in the Student Living Center. It provided a student's first experience with a professional gallery setting and offered the residents of Kansas City an increased opportunity to view student work at the Art Institute.

Between 1974 and 1977, as the nation was ravaged by the Arab oil embargo, double-digit inflation and a cynical attitude emanating from the Watergate affair, the Kansas City community

Below: The KCAI Missouri River Raft Race, early 1970s. These races commenced in the late 1960s and continued for a number of years involving competition between faculty

and students and sometimes rafts from each department. Kansas City Art Institute students exhibited as much creativity and passion in their social life as they did in their studies.



fund-raising activity suffered, and the deficit that Lottes had worked so hard to decrease soared once again. By 1978, however, the school had balanced the budget, even had a small surplus and made inroads in reducing the accumulated operating deficit. Since 1970, the endowment fund had increased threefold to \$1,476,876; the net worth of the college was \$4,179,749; and the annual gifts and grants were increased that year from \$160,000 to \$378,000, a larger percentage increase than for any similar art school in the country. The board of governors again accepted the responsibility for raising funds along with the president of the college. They actively participated in the annual campaign to

raise funds from the community, while personally contributing fifty percent of the total dollars received.

There were 561 full-time students enrolled in the fall of 1978, with 43 full-time faculty members averaging \$16,000 in salary and eighty-eight percent holding terminal degrees of Ph.D. or M.F.A. Forty-nine percent of the student population received some sort of financial aid, while the total amount available was increasing to \$1 million per year. In 1979, Jeannette Lee, vice president of corporate design at Hallmark Cards Inc., became the first woman president of the Institute's board of governors.

Art Institute students during this period seemed to reflect the national trend toward more practical concerns and a renewed seriousness over careers and professional advancement. It was not uncommon to find students working in their studios most of the night and for them to be totally involved in their various classroom and studio projects. This has not precluded Kansas City Art Institute students, however, from enjoying themselves with as much fervor as they put into their work. From the Missouri River Raft Race, which commenced in the late 1960s and continued for a number of years involving competition between faculty and students and sometimes rafts from each department, to the annual Beaux Arts Festivals ranging in scope from the traditional student-faculty softball game and evening costume dances to the increasingly popular “drive-in” movies on the campus green and the once tried, but not soon forgotten, student mud-wrestling contest, Kansas City Art Institute students exhibited as much creativity and passion in their social life as they did in their studies.

The Benton Award

In mid-summer 1974, the board of governors began to act on long-standing hopes to honor the Art Institute’s famous former teacher Thomas Hart Benton by establishing an award in his name. The board’s initiative resulted in members of the staff meeting with Thomas and

his wife, Rita Benton, to lay plans for the award and its initial presentation. Benton was most enthusiastic, and in December the board unanimously passed a resolution establishing the Thomas Hart Benton Award “to be granted annually to an individual whose life symbolizes the concerns, values and ideals he possessed.” George T. O’Maley was appointed coordinator of the award program. O’Maley’s relationship with the Art Institute began in his youth, when his family lived in the house that later became the keystone of the painting studios. His close personal relationship with the Bentons began a few years later. With these qualifications, O’Maley contacted a group of the artist’s close friends, inviting them to serve as the Thomas Hart Benton Associates. “Thomas Hart Benton’s role in American art is secure,” O’Maley proudly declared, “but we at the Art Institute hope that the Thomas Hart Benton Award will help to keep a light on some of his great human qualities: the rights of the individual, courage in adversity, a deep respect for nature and friendship for all.”

To perpetuate the spirit of Benton’s concern for art students, the Institute established the Thomas Hart Benton Fund to provide scholarships for KCAI students of merit and need. The Amoco Foundation of Chicago contributed funds for a casting of a bronze bust of Benton to be given to each year’s award recipients, and

James Leedy, professor of sculpture at the Institute, was commissioned to create the project. A Rita Placenza Benton Scholarship program for Kansas City area high school students was also set up concurrently with the Thomas Hart Benton Award. Benton was to be honored and the award given on his eighty-sixth birthday, April 15, 1975, but his death in January occasioned the delay of the award presentation to the fall of the year. John Gardner, founder of Common Cause, was the first recipient. Honored in succeeding years were Elliot Richardson, former director of Health, Education and Welfare; Franklin Murphy, publisher of *The Los Angeles Times*; and Mike Wallace of CBS News.

Reaching Out: The Renaissance Festival

Even with all these advances, however, the Art Institute was still left with one nagging problem. It remained outside the city's consciousness, and far too few Kansas Citians even knew that it existed, much less of its high stature and accomplishments. An effort to breach this lack of recognition by the community and, at the same time, initiate a major fund-raising project was the Renaissance Festival, which commenced in the fall of 1977. A foresighted board member, Mrs. Marie Evans, conceived the idea after reading about the success of similar events in such places as Minnesota and California and then proceeded to convince a skeptical board to make it happen.

While the first festival was largely rained out, attracted only 7,500 people and actually lost money, it later became a rousing success. The 1978 festival earned a net surplus of \$40,000, and by 1983, the now-expanded festival attracted 150,000 people, had become the second largest annual event in the state of Kansas and generated \$215,000 for the Institute. From the fifty performers, seven craftsmen and dedicated volunteers who endured the rain and mud of 1977, the festival grew in just seven years to a cast of more than 2,500 performers, nearly 500 craftsmen and hundreds of volunteers. The original site of twelve acres adjacent to the Agricultural Hall of Fame in Bonner Springs, Kansas, was expanded to 200 acres of games and exhibits. More importantly, the festival raised community consciousness, giving the Institute tremendous publicity and exposure.

At the same time, the faculty and students began making themselves more known to the community by working with corporations, foundations, hospitals and schools on various art projects, everything from film making to mural painting. The result, both directly and indirectly, was an increase in the number of local art galleries, art purchases and the number of Kansas City Art Institute graduates who remained in Kansas City to establish themselves as designers, illustrators, photographers, commercial artists, sculptors and painters.

More and more, the Art Institute was regarded as an asset to the city and was considered a center of creative energy and vital to the metropolitan area. Faculty and staff members were

commissioned to create works for the city. Below: Students assisting sculpture chairman Dale Eldred, installing work at the Nelson-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, Missouri.



Following a period of growth during the 1970s and three years of stable or modestly declining enrollments that were anticipated, the school was hit hard in the fall of 1982 when enrollment dropped unexpectedly and significantly. Due to high national unemployment, federal financial aid that did not keep pace with rising tuition

and weak recruiting practices, fewer students enrolled that semester than the previous year, dropping the total enrollment down to 438. This in turn reduced revenue from tuition, causing a potential loss of nine percent of the planned operating budget.

Immediately, the trustees and administration created a four-year financial plan to deal with the crisis. Some very difficult decisions were made, including reduction of some faculty and staff, but with enrollment up by fourteen students in the fall of 1983 and fund-raising up forty-three percent from the previous year, the Institute weathered the crisis while maintaining the high quality of education and fiscal strength for the future. In the process, the college achieved stronger institutional offerings in the degree program, more efficient management, a new cooperative summer seminar with the Osaka University of the Arts in Japan and an increased level of dedication to excellence. At the same time significant restoration and historical preservation of Mineral Hall, which had been acquired for the school in the 1960s by board members William T. Kemper Jr. and Louis Sosland, was completed. The building now serves as the college's admissions office and, along with Vanderslice Hall, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In the fall of 1983, John Lottes announced that he was leaving the Art Institute to become president of the Minneapolis Society of Fine Arts, a private, nonprofit corporation that oversees the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and the Minneapolis Institute of Art. According to Robert H. Lange, chairman of the Kansas City Art Institute's board of governors, Lottes "made

an outstanding contribution to the Institute. Under his leadership, the school has made significant gains in programming as well as building a sound financial base for the future." In thirteen years as president of the school, Lottes was primarily responsible for annual gifts increasing from about \$160,000 to \$741,000 per year (\$526,000 in private gifts and \$215,000 from the Renaissance Festival). In 1983, endowment gifts amounted to \$578,000, bringing the total endowment market value to \$4,400,000; in 1970 the endowment principal was only \$320,000.

Lottes stated to the press, however, that his greatest accomplishment was "measured by the graduates in the last several years — they've gone off and made names for themselves and for the Institute. Also," he continued, "we've been able to attract and retain faculty and students with international reputations." At the same time the school had attracted more Kansas City area residents to its classes. When Lottes became president, only about five percent of approximately 500 students were area residents. At the end of his tenure, the figure was about twenty-five percent, and, at the same time, the Institute had achieved a national posture and a national mix of students. The school also gained stature at home. "We're now recognized as a part of the community," Lottes proudly declared. "Before, we were viewed as private and secret. The

Renaissance Festival each year has done a great deal to get attention from those not traditionally involved in the arts.”

Indeed, more and more, the Art Institute was regarded as an asset to the city and was considered a center of creative energy and vital to the metropolitan area. The city frequently focused its attention on members of the college community as the work and activities of the students, faculty and staff were often featured in local newspapers and magazines, while student video productions were broadcast by the city’s PBS affiliate and cable stations. Faculty and staff members were commissioned to create works for the city. A painting student completed a public mural for the city, and sculpture works by several students were located along the city’s boulevards. Student and faculty exhibited their work annually in the important Mid-Four exhibitions at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art and regularly in the city’s commercial galleries. Design and photography students served internships in many local, nonprofit organizations, and many students participated in community service activities. A real dialogue existed now more than ever before between Kansas City and the Art Institute, and a great deal of it can be credited to the efforts of John Lottes.

In September 1983, Richard W. Dodderidge was named interim president of the Institute.

Dodderidge, who operated a national advertising agency consulting business, had been a member of the board of governors since 1977 and had served as a member of its executive council.

With enthusiasm and patient concern, Dodderidge, aided by dean of the college S. Allen Jenks, guided the Institute well through the interim period. In the fall of 1984, the board named George Parrino president of the Art Institute, and he assumed his position in January 1985. Parrino was a painter who came to Kansas City from the San Antonio Art Institute in Texas, where he had been a faculty member, dean and director of the college. He presided over a college that was experiencing increased enrollment of 474 students representing forty-one states and eight foreign countries. About sixty-three percent of the students received some sort of financial aid, with annual tuition set at \$6,600, accounting for approximately sixty percent of the operating budget of \$4.7 million. There were forty full-time faculty members earning an average annual salary of \$24,103. The school seemed to be on its way back to reclaiming its prestige and financial solvency, and it would be Parrino’s charge to take the Kansas City Art Institute into its second century.

The Art Institute at 100 – A Century of Excellence and Beyond

On February 8, 1985, the Art Institute celebrated its 100th anniversary at a benefit party at the Alameda Plaza Hotel in Kansas City where more than 500 people attended the black-tie banquet and dance. Among the guests were Kansas City Mayor Richard L. Berkley, who read a proclamation recounting the school's history and declaring the day of special recognition for the college. Kansas City banker William T. Kemper Jr., a longtime benefactor of the Institute who was prominent at the old Beaux Arts balls, was honorary chairman of the event. He was recognized with three others who figured prominently in the history of the school: the late Walt Disney, the late Thomas Hart Benton and the late Joyce C. Hall, founder of Hallmark Cards Inc., a benefactor of the college.

As a tribute to Mr. Disney, an exhibition called "All Started by a Mouse" was displayed in the foyer of the hotel's ballroom. After the party, the seventy photographs and graphics depicting Disney's life and giant entertainment projects he developed was moved to the Art Institute campus, where they remained open to public viewing for six weeks. During the celebration, Art Institute President George Parrino announced the purchase of a house and a lot at 320 East 45th Street, at the south end of the campus, with money granted by the Crosby Kemper Foundations. The structure was the last piece of property on the block not owned by the school,

and after renovation, it would be used to house faculty and classrooms for an expanding liberal arts department. Parrino also announced the first endowed chair at the school, to be called the Joyce C. Hall Distinguished Professor of Design. Ivan Chermayeff and Milton Glaser were the initial recipients of this honor. They were followed in order by Emilio Ambasz, Katherine and Michael McCoy, Michael Vanderbyl, April Greiman and Bill Moggeridge. In the fall of 1991, Dietmar Winkler became the first full-time Joyce C. Hall Distinguished Professor of Design at KCAI and was followed in that capacity by Stefan Lindfors and Fred Murrell. Mary Lou Brous is the most recent professor to hold this title at the school.

In April 1985, President Parrino announced that Wilbur Niewald, chairman of the college's department of painting and printmaking since 1958 and faculty member since 1949, had been awarded the academic honor of "senior professor of painting" by the Institute's board of governors for "many years of exceptional teaching and leadership." This was the first time in the college's 100-year history that such a distinction had been bestowed. Niewald retired from his duties as chairman to devote himself full time to teaching and painting. Upon his retirement in 1992, he was awarded the title of professor emeritus.

Wilbur Niewald fondly recalled his seventy years at the Art Institute, as a student in children's classes, as a full-time college student and as a faculty member for forty-three years.

"In my years of teaching at the school, this close, sharing relationship with the students made each day a fulfilling and meaningful time in my life."

Below: Wilbur Niewald in his studio, early 1980s.



In his forty-three years of teaching at the Art Institute, Niewald has influenced generations of students with his philosophy that becoming a painter entails mastering that simplest and most difficult of processes, "learning to see." As one of his students, Dan Gustin, who went on to become a professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, explained: "He literally taught us to see; to make paintings from our perceptual experience. This allowed us to build a strong foundation while, at the same time,

fostering real growth as an artist, giving us a firm base on which to build."

Twelve years later, Niewald fondly recalled his seventy years at the Art Institute, as a student in children's classes, as a full-time college student and as a faculty member for forty-three years. After praising the talented and committed students and outstanding professional faculty, Niewald wrote that, "In my years of teaching at the school, this close, sharing relationship with the students made each day a fulfilling and meaningful time in my life."

In 1992, the Kemper Gallery marked Niewald's retirement from teaching at the school with a 40-year retrospective of his outstanding works, including landscapes, abstractions, still lifes, portraits and nudes. Twelve years later this "Kansas City icon," as he was referred to by Alice Thorson, art critic of *The Kansas City Star*, was still painting, and the Albrecht-Kemper Museum in St. Joseph, Missouri, honored him with a highly acclaimed retrospective of more than sixty of his paintings and drawings from 1951-2004. Warren Rosser, who has taught at the college since 1972, was appointed to succeed Niewald as chairman of the department.

The Presidency of Beatrice Rivas Sanchez

George Parrino left the Institute in June of 1987 to become dean of the college at State University 59

of New York in Purchase. In the fall, it was announced that Beatrice Rivas Sanchez would become the first woman president of the Kansas City Art Institute. Prior to her appointment as president, she served as dean of the Cranbrook Academy of Art, a prestigious graduate school in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. During her eight years as president, the Art Institute launched a successful capital campaign, completed a long-range strategic plan and opened the new Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art and Design (now called the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art).

The Kemper Museum was a result of a \$6 million gift from R. Crosby Kemper Jr., chairman and chief executive officer of United Missouri Bancshares Inc. The land across Warwick Boulevard was bought for the school from the University of Missouri for \$2 million by the Hall Family Foundation. The museum opened in 1994 amid much fanfare, but already there was a draining and sometimes embarrassing battle between the college and the donor over its administration. In the summer of 1995, school trustees decided that it would be better to separate the college from the museum, and the land was sold back to the Kemper Museum Operating Foundation for the original purchase price of \$2 million.

The Charlotte Crosby Kemper Gallery began its 25th anniversary season in the fall of 1988 with a unique contemporary exhibition, "An Elegant Merging," examining the development of computer-assisted imagery from the 1950s to the present. Other notable exhibits during this anniversary celebration included: "The Works of Nathan Oliveira," "Contemporary American Collage," "Innovators of American Illustration," "The Ceramic Sculpture of Jack Earl," "The Painted Constructions of Warren Rosser" and the "Missouri Visual Artists Biennial."

In 1990, the board of trustees made the financial resources available to honor distinguished faculty with generous cash awards that would be given biannually. The special awards were for excellence in teaching, distinguished achievement and outstanding project, and the first three recipients were Wilbur Niewald, Ken Ferguson and Patrick Clancy. (See appendix for recipients 1992-2004.)

In 1993, the Art Institute was shocked and saddened to hear that Dale Eldred, who had chaired the sculpture department for thirty-three years, had suffered a fatal accident desperately trying to save his art in his studio after a terrible flood had ravaged the city. Eldred was a dynamic and inspirational force at the college, often taking his students to help install his monumental sculptures throughout the world. He was best known for his massive site-specific steel sculptures and

Below: Chairman of the sculpture department Dale Eldred and his colleague Jim Leedy (right), 1992. Eldred was a dynamic and inspirational force at the college, often taking his students to install his monumental sculptures

throughout the world. He was best known for his massive site-specific steel sculptures and light reflections. His creative works transformed the world he loved and lived in with endless intensity.

Jim Leedy has been a member of the faculty since 1966. A founder of Kansas City's Crossroads Arts District, he received the Missouri Excellence in Education Award and a lifetime achievement award from the Charlotte Street Foundation.



light reflections. His creative works transformed the world he loved and lived in with endless intensity. Past president of the Art Institute Andrew Morgan remembered Eldred as a “Thunder God ... a person of near superhuman powers who would exude confidence, inspire students and generate the magical powers of a great shaman.” According to his widow, Roberta Lord, Eldred “liked to say that his work extended at a point mid-way between vision and invention: the vision of the relationship of time to light and to space and the invention of a means

to make that vision manifest.” Jim Leedy, who worked with Eldred as a colleague for nearly thirty years, eulogized him by stating, “His lust for life, his love for nature and his brilliant art will live forever through the people he continues to touch.”

In the spring of 1995, Sanchez submitted her resignation as president of the Art Institute, to be effective June 30 of that year. As the board commenced a national search for a new president, it appointed Ronald Cattellino, the college's 61

Ken Ferguson was a Promethean force in the life of the school. Together with his colleagues Victor Babu and George Timock, he molded an undergraduate ceramics program that is widely

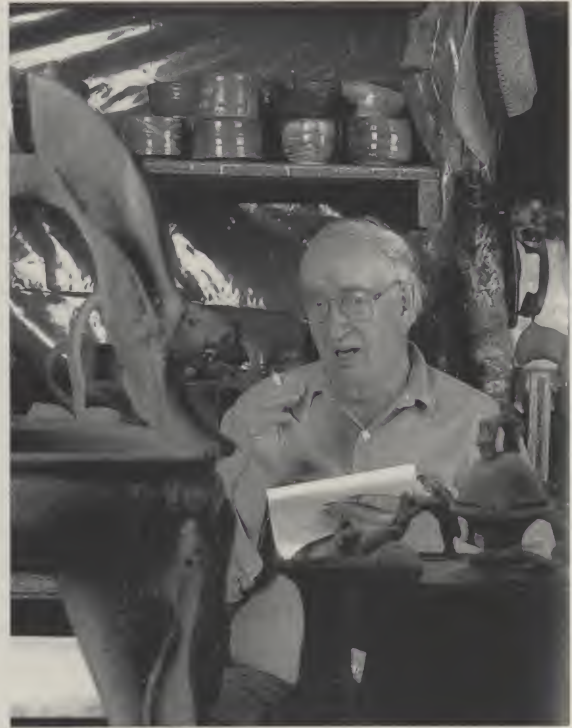
recognized as one of the finest in the country. At a retirement party in his honor, Ferguson proudly declared his love for the Kansas City Art Institute. "What a pleasure it is to teach at a good

school. I have looked forward to every day. I thank the students for letting me be a part of their lives." Below: Ken Ferguson in his studio, 1994.

senior vice president for administration, as interim president. Cattelino had been with the college since 1971, first as chief accountant, then director of finance and facilities and lastly, since 1982, as vice president for administration.

In the spring of 1996, Ken Ferguson stepped down as chairman of the ceramics department at KCAI, a position he held for more than thirty years. Upon his retirement, he was awarded the title of professor emeritus. Since he taught his first class on campus in 1964, Ferguson was a Promethean force in the life of the school. Together with his colleagues Victor Babu and George Timock, he molded an undergraduate ceramics program that is widely recognized as one of the finest in the country. Many of the KCAI ceramics graduates have gone on to become well respected in the field.

Simultaneously, Ferguson has pursued his own career as a potter, which has brought him international recognition and contributed to the development of new standards of excellence in contemporary ceramics. He left his students and the school an enduring legacy of Emersonian self-reliance, hard work, integrity, vision and a passion for excellence. According to colleague Jane Lackey, "His years of teaching and making art are synthesized into a unique blend of experience, wisdom, practical advice and playful wit ...



approach, placing excellence of educational values above all else. He is a constant reminder that our mission is to serve our students with the highest quality of generosity in teaching." At a retirement party held in his honor, Ferguson proudly declared his love for the Kansas City Art Institute. "What a pleasure it is to teach at a good school. I have looked forward to every day. I thank the students for letting me be a part of their lives."

The Presidency of Kathleen Collins: Positioning KCAT for the 21st Century

In January 1996, board chair Janet Miller announced the appointment of Kathleen Collins to serve as the next president of the Kansas City Art Institute, to commence the following summer. Collins, an accomplished photographer, had been dean of the School of Art and Design, New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University since 1989, where she also held the position of full professor. She declared several goals, which included increased participation with community — particularly the business community, as well as with other arts organizations — and a new focus on interdisciplinary studies in which students are encouraged to take courses in various departments and where faculty in different fields team up in certain courses.

From the beginning, Collins's administration exerted new energy with the Kansas City community and the college's alumni, in its partnership with business and in its academic leadership. Positioning the college for the 21st century, the Art Institute began to assess how it could change its institutional structure, culture and academic programs in order to redefine its role in relation to visual arts and culture, meet the needs of its current and potential students and ensure financial viability. To implement these ideas, a strategic plan was created in the spring and summer of 1997 by working teams made up

of administrators, faculty and staff. The plan was approved that fall by the board of trustees.

Eight critical issues were articulated by the working teams: academic leadership; enrollment management; standards of measurement; a budget that would ensure short- and long-term financial viability; creating a campus community; improving student services; contributing to the external community while positioning the Institute to generate broad community support; and bringing about a more diverse academic community.

Collins crafted a vision for the school that involved "broadening what we're about." Under her leadership, the college began to expand course offerings and internship programs. A greater emphasis on professional practice became a campus-wide concern. "Graduates must be broad in their thinking about job opportunities," declared Collins. "We as educators must provide them with career information and encourage their creativity, too. We have to tell them that those two things are not mutually exclusive."

With a strong belief in fiscal responsibility, she also changed the way the college conducted its business. Her philosophy was simple and direct: "We're not going to have an operating debt. Period."

"It's a real shift," Collins explained. "Basically it's saying you have to live within your means. If 63

Below: Warren Rosser, painting and printmaking chair, in critique with painting students, 1995. Rosser, whose works are exhibited in galleries and

museums worldwide, was named the William T. Kemper Distinguished Professor of Painting in 1997.

you don't have it, you must not spend it." When she arrived, the Art Institute was still disentangling its budget from that of the Kemper Museum. The college also had developed the habit — typical among nonprofit institutions — of retiring debt by expending capital assets or waiting for a major donor to ride to the rescue. Collins pursued a different approach. "I think it's really a critical thing to understand that major donors want to invest in an institution that's financially sound," she stated. "You have to run things like a business. That's a trend in the nonprofit world, with foundations and individual donors all demanding and frankly deserving greater accountability."

With fiscal accountability in mind, a number of decisions needed to be made. In 1997, due to diminished returns, the college sold the Renaissance Festival for \$800,000. Most of the proceeds went into the Marie Evans Endowed Scholarship Fund as a lasting tribute to the foresighted board member who had started the festival twenty years earlier. To her credit, during two decades that the Art Institute owned the festival, it brought in \$2 million for the college. Originally envisioned as an added position in the painting department, the William T. Kemper Distinguished Professor of Painting was awarded to the school's painting chair, Warren Rosser, who had been a distinguished member of the faculty for twenty-six years.



With a multiyear grant from the New York-based National Arts Stabilization Fund and matching funds from major donors, the college by June 30, 1997, had eliminated its accumulated deficit and had a small net current asset position. Since then, the college has maintained a net current asset position. This was accomplished by reducing the operating budget by more than \$1 million during the period 1997-98 to 2004-05.

Below left: Foundation
"Circularity Workshop" with
professor Steve Whitacre, 1995.
Whitacre and his colleagues
pioneered the first program of

its kind for art schools in
America. Under his leadership,
the program matured into one
of the finest in the nation.

Below right: Textile printing in
fiber studio, with professor
Jason Pollen, 1995. Pollen's
international reputation as an
artist who creates magic with

dye and silk has been a catalyst
for a greatly expanded and well-
respected fiber department.



Through a challenge grant in 2001, the Hall Family Foundation made a significant grant to KCAI, which was based on meeting certain annual fund goals and enrollment goals. The annual fund goals were met, and the foundation provided topping grants for \$250,000 two years in a row. In addition, the foundation provided \$1 million, payable over a three-year period, for faculty and staff salaries based on program and enrollment goals.

Below: Masquerade 2004: *Mythopolis*, Kathleen Collins, president, and Charles Sosland, chairman of the board of trustees. The event alternates with the art auction.

Right: Project Wall, H&R Block Artspace, Deanna Dikeman, *Leaving and Waving*, 2002. As part of a four-year, \$15 million campus revitalization program, the school opened its new gallery in November 1999.



“Masquerade 2004: *Mythopolis*” raised \$268,000 for student scholarships.

As part of a four-year, \$15 million campus revitalization program, the Art Institute opened its new gallery, the H&R Block Artspace, in November 1999. Located at 16 East 43rd Street, near KCAI’s campus, the renovated 10,000-square-foot building is dedicated to contemporary art and visual arts education. The Artspace was a result of a \$400,000 lead gift from the H&R Block Foundation in Kansas City, Missouri. The building was renovated by nationally renowned BNIM Architects, an architectural and planning firm known for its strong community involvement in its home base of Kansas City. Raechell Smith, director of exhibitions at the school since 1996, was appointed by the president to be the director of the gallery. At its dedication ceremony, President Collins stated, “The H&R Block Artspace at the Kansas City Art Institute will be a vital resource to the college, the greater Kansas City community and the regional and national arts community.” At the fifth anniversary celebration in 2004, Henry Bloch, who co-founded H&R Block with his brother Richard, commended the Artspace for fulfilling its visual arts and education mission and declared: “I can say unequivocally that the Artspace is the best investment our foundation has ever made.”

As part of her financial plan, and having sold the Renaissance Festival, Collins and others decided the college would create fundraisers that were more closely aligned with the mission and activities of the college, hence the launch of the student scholarship benefit, Masquerade. Faculty, staff and students were directly involved in the planning and execution of this event, and it has been a widely anticipated and very successful community affair every two years. This event alternates with the KCAI Art Auction (now the Art and Design Auction), which in 2003 raised

The Artspace annually presents five to seven exhibitions, most accompanied by an illustrated brochure that includes an essay by the curator, as well as small curated exhibitions drawing work from the Kansas City Art

Institute's permanent collection. Top photo: Wenda Gu, from *middle kingdom to biological millennium*, H&R Block Artspace, 2003. Lower photo: B.F.A. exhibition, 2004, H&R Block Artspace. The annual B.F.A. show

provides young artists with the experience of a professionally organized exhibition before they conclude their studies at the Art Institute.



Right: Jannes Library and Learning Center, 2002. The transformation of an historic home to a state-of-the-art library was due to the generosity of

Nicholas Jannes, an alumnus and board member from 1984 to 2002, and other major donors, including the William T. Kemper Foundation.

The Artspace annually presents five to seven exhibitions, most accompanied by an illustrated brochure that includes an essay by the curator, as well as small curated exhibitions drawing work from the Kansas City Art Institute's permanent collection in the Roger and Joni Cohen Resource Room and special projects in the Project Room. The inaugural exhibition, "The Viewing Room," was a regional premier of important video work by four internationally known artists that set a high standard for exhibitions to follow. Lee Boroson, the first artist-in-residence at the Artspace, created an ambitious site-specific installation, "Windowbox," which merited discussion as an excellent and innovative presentation by top arts professionals at a national curators panel. In addition to presenting exhibitions that focus on contemporary art practices and issues, the Artspace strives to introduce innovative strategies in presenting art to audiences and students. The exhibitions "Pierogi Flatfiles" and the Kansas City "Flatfile" introduced an exciting and easy way of making work accessible to viewers, and many variations were organized by students and emerging artists in Kansas City after these presentations at the Artspace.

The Artspace Project Wall, an ongoing site for public art projects, presents up to two commissioned or curated projects each year, alternating between national and regional artists. "Protect Me From What I Want," a project from the

well-known Survival Series by artist Jenny Holzer, was the first presentation of this important American artist's work in Kansas City and brought hundreds of first-time visitors to the Artspace. The Artspace helps support the Charlotte Street Fund, which focuses on raising awareness of the visual arts in Kansas City. The gallery also presents the Annual B.F.A. Exhibition, a collection of the work of graduating seniors at KCAI. The show provides young artists with the experience of a professionally organized exhibition before they conclude their studies at the Art Institute. In addition, the Artspace biannually presents an invitational exhibition of outstanding work by KCAI faculty. In just the first two years, attendance for Artspace exhibitions and programs reached 35,000 visitors, expanding audiences from the immediate community of the Art Institute to include the local, regional and national art community. Since 1999, the Artspace has presented more than 50 exhibitions featuring the work of more than 2,000 artists.

Other campus revitalization projects completed during this period included an addition to the Richard J. Stern ceramics building, a transformed neighborhood market on East 43rd Street, which became home for the School of Design, and a total interior renovation of the Student Living Center. The college also enhanced its residential offerings when it pur-



Below: The newly opened Café Nerman attracts students, faculty and staff, 2003. It was made possible by a generous gift from trustee Margaret Nerman and her husband, Jerome.

chased the Chequers apartment complex on Walnut Street between 42nd and 43rd Streets in the fall of 1998. It has twenty-nine apartments for upper-class students desiring college housing. Housed in a refurbished colonial mansion at 4538 Warwick Boulevard, the Jannes Library and Learning Center was the final piece in the current revitalization project. The transformation of an historic home to a state-of-the-art library was due to the generosity of Nicholas Jannes, an alumnus and board member from 1984 to 2002, and other major donors, including the William T. Kemper Foundation. Completed in March 2002, the library provides greatly expanded space for the Art Institute's extensive and growing collections. In addition to housing all library functions, the facility included an expanded academic resource center, a career services center and a 30-station campus computer lab. When the Institute opened the doors to the new library, capping a four-year \$15 million series of campus improvements, President Collins expressed her gratitude for the generosity that made it possible and declared, "The renovations and additions help ensure the Kansas City Art Institute remains among the nation's premier colleges and as an anchor in the Kansas City community."

Working to fulfill the campus master plan, the following year saw the opening of Café Nerman on campus made possible by a generous gift



from trustee Margaret Nerman and her husband, Jerome. A beautiful patio garden adjoining it was completed in the fall of 2004, thanks to the vision of Jeannette Nichols and the generosity of the Miller Nichols Charitable Foundation. This landscaped garden was appropriately named after J.C. Nichols, president of the Art Institute from 1920-1927, who saw the need for and was instrumental in acquiring the property where the college now stands and who spoke at the dedication ceremonies for Vanderslice Hall in 1928.

Below: J.C. Nichols Patio Garden dedication, 2004. Thanks to the vision of Jeannette Nichols and the generosity of the Miller Nichols Charitable Foundation, the landscaped garden was named after J.C. Nichols,

president of the Art Institute from 1920-1927. He was involved in acquiring the property where the college now stands and spoke at the dedication ceremonies for Vanderslice Hall in 1928.



to President Collins, “The landscaping of the J.C. Nichols Patio Garden kicks off the development of the overall landscaping effort and is important to the whole cascade of improvements along Oak Street.”

The master plan received tremendous momentum on November 18, 2004, when it was announced that American Sterling Bank founder and CEO Larry Dodge and his wife, Kristina, had donated \$5 million to the Art Institute — one of the largest single gifts in the college's 120-year history. The master plan calls for the addition of a new painting building as well as extensive landscaping. Already under way was an expansion of the Irving Building, which faces Oak Street on the east side of the campus. In making the gift, Kristina Dodge stated, “The Art Institute is a center of vibrancy and creativity, full of talented people. Nothing is more gratifying to us than to be able to help them expand their creative reach.”

Collins also felt the urgency of addressing renovations that related to health and safety issues. From the early 1970s on, no significant investment had been made in campus facilities. Accrediting bodies were requiring changes relating to health and safety that, although costly, were clearly beneficial for students and faculty who spend enormous amounts of time in these environments.

The J.C. Nichols Patio Garden sets the stage for further implementation of the college's landscape master plan, which was created by Julie Moir Messervy in collaboration with Bowman Bowman Novick Inc. of Kansas City, Missouri (formerly Theis Doolittle Associates). According

In 2000, the Institute's academic programs were reorganized into four schools: The School of the Foundation Year, which provides students with the essential technical and conceptual tools that will serve as important cornerstones for their future artistic development; the School of Liberal Arts, offering majors in art history and creative writing while providing general education coursework the Art Institute deems critical to the education of the students, from freshman to senior year; the School of Fine Arts, encompassing ceramics, fiber, sculpture, painting, printmaking, photography and new media; and the School of Design, providing professional expertise and cross-disciplinary interactions in graphic design and animation.

In an effort to give students more flexibility in creating a customized curriculum that will best prepare them for careers in the visual arts, the Art Institute in 2003 introduced a new major and an additional program to its current catalog of studies. The new program, Major +, allowed students to devote up to two semesters to in-depth study of a corollary discipline. The new major, in interdisciplinary arts, allowed a select number of students to work with the newly created interdisciplinary chair to tailor their coursework and graduate with a major in interdisciplinary arts. Given the interdisciplinary nature of fine art and design, KCAI faculty and administration felt it was vital to augment the

traditional curriculum with options that would provide new opportunities for critical growth and development.

The Art Institute's last joint visitation by The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) and the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) took place in the fall of 2002. After submitting required progress reports to NASAD in early 2002, KCAI was accredited for another ten years. The NCA required extensive progress reports, which were submitted and accepted in the summer of 2003. The next comprehensive evaluation of KCAI with the NCA is scheduled to take place during the 2006-07 academic year.

A new visual identity for the college was developed in fall 2003 by Mary Lou Brous, ('82, design), the Joyce C. Hall Distinguished Professor of Design. The core graphic was created by tracing the external shape of the buildings that face in toward the central lawn. The resulting shape can then be turned, morphed and reconfigured every time it is applied. The configuration of the new visual identity — with its shape pushing out into a wider space — reflects the Art Institute's role in the community. The visual identity is intended to show that the college is influenced by and responsive to the community, while reaching out to it with innovative ideas and educational opportunities.

Beneath the actions of a contemporary visual artist is a bedrock of critical thinking and creative analysis. At the Kansas City Art Institute, those patterns and practices are developed and enhanced by the liberal arts

program. In addition to satisfying the humanities segment of the B.F.A. degree, liberal arts courses complement studio work by examining issues, events and ideas in history, literature, philosophy, creative writing, the sciences and art history.

Below: Humanities class with professor Milton Katz, 1995.

On December 30, 2004, Ken Ferguson, professor emeritus of ceramics, passed away at his home in Shawnee, Kansas, after a long illness. In an article praising his accomplishments, published December 31, 2004, in *The Kansas City Star*, Garth Clark, a prominent ceramics dealer in New York, stated that Ferguson “was probably the single most important ceramics teacher in America in the last twenty-five years. He has produced more young stars than any other teacher.”

“Ferguson’s legacy as an artist and educator was local, national, and international,” said Cary Esser, a former student who succeeded Ferguson as department chair. “His work in clay was very powerful, and he provided an incredible role model for students.” Ferguson’s obituary in *The Star* concluded with these fitting words written by his son Charles: “Wreathed in smoke and fire, he pulled clay from the earth and made works of art to challenge the terrifying abyss of time.”

Reflecting on the presidency of Kathleen Collins through 2004, former board chair Charles S. Sosland said, “Kathleen came to the school when it faced very difficult challenges. Working with faculty, staff and trustees, she turned the college in the right direction. Thanks to her leadership, enrollment increased, we made important capital improvements and the money raised for the annual fund reached an all-time high.”



A composite profile of the Art Institute in the fall of 2004 showed increased enrollment to 590 students in the bachelor of fine arts degree program, representing forty-eight states and twelve foreign countries. The Art Institute administered more than \$12 million in federal, state and institutional financial aid, which included more than \$4.4 million from the college's operating budget, in KCAI merit and need-based scholarships.

About 11 percent of the school's annual operating fund of \$12.5 million comes from individual and corporate contributors, from the fund-raising activities of the Institute's three auxiliaries and from auction and masquerade events that are held alternate years every spring. More than ninety percent of the students receive some form of financial aid, with annual tuition at \$21,326, accounting for approximately sixty-six percent of the operating budget. There were forty-four full-time faculty members, earning an average salary of \$45,350. Administrators and other full-time staff totaled ninety-six. The annual fund drive in 2002-03 exceeded its goal of \$1,420,000, the largest in the school's history, and in 2003-04 the annual fund drive raised \$1,383,000. The Institute's endowment on December 31, 2004, stood at just under \$20 million.

The H&R Block Artspace had seven exhibitions during the 2003-04 academic year attended by several thousand people, and the college brought in twenty-five nationally and internationally

recognized visiting artists for its Thursday evening lecture series. Additionally, KCAI hosts an ongoing series of exhibitions, artist-in-residence and educational programs that support and enhance the academic and public programs offered by the college. The Jannes Library and Learning Center housed 32,000 books, subscribed to more than 100 periodicals and counted a collection of more than 100,000 in the slide library. Both the Artspace and the new library garnered merit awards from the American Institute of Architects, Kansas City, and both serve to renew the college's commitment to the midtown Southmoreland neighborhood and the Kansas City community.

Additionally, the Art Institute has supported the development of new private, commercial and alternative galleries in Kansas City's Crossroads Arts District and West Bottoms area, both located in or near downtown Kansas City. Founded by Art Institute board members, faculty, alumni, students and friends, many galleries have emerged to support Kansas City's flourishing arts community. Many KCAI faculty, alumni and students who are showcasing their work locally have garnered regional and national attention.

Continuing its role as a leader in education and the visual arts, the Kansas City Art Institute and its Artspace continue to effectively contribute to the cultural vitality of the city and help make

Continuing education classes and special programs provide learning opportunities for children, youth and adults. Enrollement in these programs exceeded 700 in 2004. Photo by Mark McDonald.



Kansas City an arts destination for students, artists, collectors and members of the national arts community.

Special programs have greatly expanded in recent years into numerous highly successful programs. Continuing education has grown from serving only adults, with an enrollment of 339 in 1998, to serving children, youth and adults, enrolling more than 700 in 2004. There was a highly successful Educators ArtLab, a new middle-school Art Camp and a pre-college art lab enrolling 50 to 70 high school students each summer under the supervision of the Dean of Student Life. Since 2002, the school has created Art of Team workshops for several corporations, and there were new certificate programs in digital desktop publishing and multimedia studies in which 225 people participated. Study abroad programs also were greatly expanded. A highly successful Art on the Edge of Politics class taught by two liberal arts professors took students to Poland, the Czech Republic and Germany and has enrolled close to 100 students over a five-year period. Three other interdisciplinary studio and liberal arts courses were also offered to KCAI students in Mexico, Italy and Hungary.

For more than three decades, the KCAI visiting artist program has brought such distinguished artists to campus as Laurie Anderson, Alice Aycock, Lynda Benglis, John Cage, Richard

Diebenkorn, Milton Glaser, Julie Moir Messervy, Alice Neal, Tim Rollins, Martha Schwartz and William Wegman. Focusing on strengthening community links through the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, an anonymous donor has funded a five-year initiative to help revitalize the downtown loop and to support the Kansas City Art Institute as a valuable community asset. During the first two years of the Art in the Loop project, the focus will be on the creation of new works by KCAI faculty or graduates. During phase two of the program, there will be additional educational programming and the potential to bring a world-renowned artist to Kansas City to collaborate with KCAI students on the project.

These impressive statistics and new initiatives, however, tell only a small part of what has made the Kansas City Art Institute a very special place. For 120 years, the Art Institute has been developing and evolving for the total education of artists, designers and craftsmen. It is generally regarded as one of the premier colleges of art and design in the nation. This four-year undergraduate school provides a learning environment on a beautifully landscaped fifteen-acre campus with specialized studios and work areas offering some of the most excellent and spacious facilities for art and design students in the United States. The Art Institute is a dynamic institution that is located in the cultural heart of the city, sur-

rounded by two nationally recognized art museums. The faculty of the Institute is made up of practicing artists and scholars who have acquired national and international reputations for their creative accomplishments, research and teaching. Their work is seen regularly in commercial galleries and major museums, in traveling exhibitions, in important publications and on television in the United States and overseas. Work of the studio faculty can be found in public and private collections throughout the world. The liberal arts faculty is recognized for their scholarly research, articles, monographs, textbooks and creative writing. They frequently participate in important national and international conferences and have lectured throughout the United States and abroad.

Faculty also act as consultants to educational institutions and industry and are invited to jury important exhibitions. They have traveled as Fulbright scholars throughout Europe and Asia and received prestigious grants and awards from such organizations as the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Ford Foundation, the John D. Rockefeller Foundation, the Carnegie Foundation and the Hallmark Corporate Foundation. Throughout the years, the faculty have also developed innovative and exciting programs that have received national recognition for

being among the very best of those providing education in the visual arts today.

Each of the major department faculties has developed a curriculum in their respective areas to promote the student's technical and creative skills and the development of their personal direction. Practicing the belief that each student should be allowed his or her own creative personality and style, every one of the major departments at the school cultivates the unique strength and diversity of each individual, thus engendering an individually centered educational experience for the development of professional artists and designers.

Throughout its history, the Art Institute has been fortunate in having a board of trustees with members who are generous with their time, energy and money and who, like the numerous volunteers on the various committees, are personally involved with the school. The college has an exceptional staff whose strength and dedication to the Art Institute are invaluable, and students over the years have been a source of inspiration and pride. Generally, twenty-five percent of these men and women pursue graduate degrees in their studio disciplines, art history and creative writing, and many of these will seek careers in the teaching profession. Other graduates move directly into the marketplace, joining firms or setting up their own studios. Because of

their many skills and abilities, numerous graduates have obtained jobs related to their undergraduate study to support their early artistic careers. Multimedia artist Robert Rauschenberg; painter Keith Jacobshagen; ceramists Richard Notkin and Akio Takamori; graphic designer April Greiman; fiber artist and fashion designer Marisol Deluna; sculptors Robert Morris and Kate and Mel Zigler; and photographers Thomas Barrow and Robert Parke-Harrison are just a few of the distinguished artists who studied at the Kansas City Art Institute and have achieved renown in their chosen profession.

The Kansas City Art Institute is unique in that all members of the college community — trustees, faculty, staff, students and alumni — share a common interest in the visual arts. Stimulation and energy become a shared experience providing the impetus for student and faculty work of great imagination, skill and intensity, making the Art Institute a very special place and an outstanding resource for higher education in America. Throughout its history, the Art Institute has been a leader in teaching, producing and sponsoring art that evokes thought and provokes reaction. The school takes great pride in its stated mission: “To be a leader in the visual arts and design education by preparing gifted students for lifelong creativity through intensive interaction with preeminent faculty and facilities and by stimulating active

public awareness, support and participation in the visual arts and design.”

From its beginnings as an urge toward culture and civic betterment in a new and still rustic city, the Kansas City Art Institute, through the dedication, skill and talent of its supporters, administration, faculty and staff and the achievement of its students and alumni, has developed into a significant cultural force in the Kansas City community and the nation. The school entered the 2004-05 academic year proudly focused on the importance of its mission as a private, independent college of art and design that for 120 years has established an environment in which artists, whatever their individual disciplines, can find and nurture the best in themselves — thus to become a vital song that makes creativity dance. In doing this in innovative and imaginative ways, the Art Institute, in all its distinguished history, has enhanced the quality of life for the residents of Kansas City and for all the many of us who have been touched by it.

Below: Professor Shirley Luke
Schnell leads the procession of
dignitaries, faculty and KCAI
graduates from campus to
commencement ceremonies at
a nearby church, May 2004.
Photo by Frankie D. Messer.



Legacy of Leadership

Through the late 1980s, the Kansas City Art Institute's governing body was the known as the board of governors. After John Uhlmann became chairman of the board in 1985, the name of the governing body was changed to board of trustees. Meanwhile, the administrative head of the college has been known as director of education or president, depending on the era. From 1950 to 1959, the college had no director, and the highest-ranking administrator during that period was the dean of the college, as shown below.

Date	Volunteer Leadership	Administrative Leadership
1886	Edward H. Allen, president	
1888	Charles C. Ripley, president	Laurence S. Brumidi, director
	Charles C. Ripley, president	Elmer Boyd Smith, director
	Charles C. Ripley, president	J. Franklin Steacy, director
	Charles C. Ripley, president	Alfred Houghton Clark, director
1893	<i>Fire destroyed school — activities at minimum</i>	
1907	Joseph C. Ford, president	Howard Huselton, director
1909	Dr. Charles W. Moore, president	Howard Huselton, director
	Charles C. Ripley, president	Howard Huselton, director
1910	Edwin W. Shields, president	Howard Huselton, director
1912	Edwin W. Shields, president	Thomas Tyrone, director
1920	J.C. Nichols, president	Virgil Barker, director
1922	J.C. Nichols, president	H.M. Kurtzworth, director
1924	J.C. Nichols, president	Robert A. Holland, director
1927	Frank M. Bernardin, president	Robert A. Holland, director
1932	W. Rickert Fillmore, president	Rossiter Howard, director
1934	W. Rickert Fillmore, president	Rossiter Howard, director
1936	Fred C. Vincent, president	Rossiter Howard, director
1940	Clarence E. Shepard, president	Rossiter Howard, director
1941	Clarence E. Shepard, president	Keith Martin, director
1942	William T. Kemper Jr., president	Keith Martin, director
1944	Wallace C. Goffe, president	Wallace W. Rosenbauer, director

Date Volunteer Leadership

1950	Wallace C. Goffe, president
1951	Charles T. Thompson, president
1953	T.J. Strickler, president
1955	Joseph S. Atha, president
1956	Harry M. Gambrel, chairman
1959	Harry M. Gambrel, chairman
1960	Byron C. Shutz, chairman
1963	Earle K. Radford Jr., chairman
1966	Louis Sosland, chairman
1968	Robert S. Thompson, chairman
1970	William N. Deramus III, chairman
1974	George E. Powell Jr., chairman
1977	R. Gordon Martin, chairman
1979	Jeannette Lee, chairman
1982	Robert H. Lange, chairman
1983	Robert H. Lange, chairman
1984	Robert H. Lange, chairman
1985	George Kroh, chairman
1987	John Uhlmann, chairman
1990	Donald Pratt, chairman
1993	Janet Miller, chairman
1995	Janet Miller, chairman
1996	Roger L. Cohen, chairman
2000	J. Gordon Kingsley, chairman
2001	Roger L. Cohen, chairman
2001	Charles S. Sosland, chairman
2004	Herb Kohn, chairman

Administrative Leadership

Dr. J. B. Smith, dean
Dr. J. B. Smith, dean
Dr. J. B. Smith, dean
David L. Strout, dean
David L. Strout, dean
Richard H. Brunell, president
Andrew W. Morgan, president
Andrew W. Morgan, president
Andrew W. Morgan, president
Andrew W. Morgan, president
John W. Lottes, president
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Bibliography and Acknowledgements

The two previous histories of the Art Institute, *An Historical Sketch of the Kansas City Art Institute and School of Design*, by Mary M. Miller (1928) and *The Kansas City Art Institute and School of Design: A History of Community Achievement* by Mazee Bush Owens and Frances C. Bush (1964), were invaluable resources for this project and due credit is acknowledged as the present text draws liberally from both of them. Although I contributed extensive research and editing and added significantly to the story, the first part of the book is theirs as much as mine. An early history of Kansas City by Carrie Westlake Whitney published in 1908 and various materials found in the Missouri Valley Room of the Kansas City, Missouri Public Library were also very helpful. Historical material of significance found in the Art Institute Archives include numerous scrapbooks and files, the board of governors minutes from 1932, auditors reports beginning in 1928, *The Kansas City Art Institute Quarterly Review* (1944-1950), the president's annual report and the catalogues of the school from 1914 to the present that are housed in the library.

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Milton Katz joined the Kansas City Art Institute faculty in 1974 and as a professor in the college's liberal arts department has inspired generations of students. From 1989 to 2000, he served as chair of the department, now known as the School of Liberal Arts. Dr. Katz teaches American studies; art, literature and film of the Holocaust; and peace and conflict resolution. He also is the author of *Ban the Bomb: A History of SANE, the Committee for Sane Nuclear Policy, 1957-1985*, published in 1986 by Greenwood Press, and co-author with John B. McLendon Jr. of *Breaking Through: The NAIA and the Integration of Intercollegiate Athletics in Post World War II America*, 1988. He has written more than two dozen articles, book chapters and reviews on peace and social justice issues in contemporary American history, most recently "A Desperate Conversation: Art of the Holocaust" in *Teaching the Shoah in the Twenty-First Century: Topics and Topographies*, 2004, and "Esther Brown: In Pursuit of Human Rights and Social Justice," in *Kansans Who Made a Difference: Agitators, Motivators and Innovators*, 2005.

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Dr. Katz has received grants and research awards from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Missouri Humanities Council, the Mellon Foundation, the Alliance of Independent Colleges of Art and the Kansas City Regional Council for Higher Education. He received a Fulbright-Hays grant to study and research art of the Holocaust in Poland and the Czech Republic in the summer of 1996. In 1998, he received the KCAI Special Projects Award, and in 2001 he was recognized by the college with the Excellence in Teaching Award. In 2004, he was nominated for the KCAI Distinguished Achievement Award.

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cluster around a laptop computer, while the adjoining photo shows a water color class, 1948. Below is a life drawing class, 1948, while above we see students in an informal critique, 2003, with Warren Rosser, chair of the

painting department. (2003 photos by Tal Wilson, KCAI '81.) Historic photos from the archives of the Jannes Library and Learning Center enrich a lively text by author Milton S. Katz, Ph.D., liberal arts professor.

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